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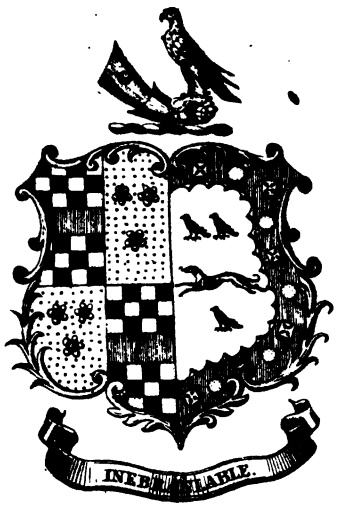

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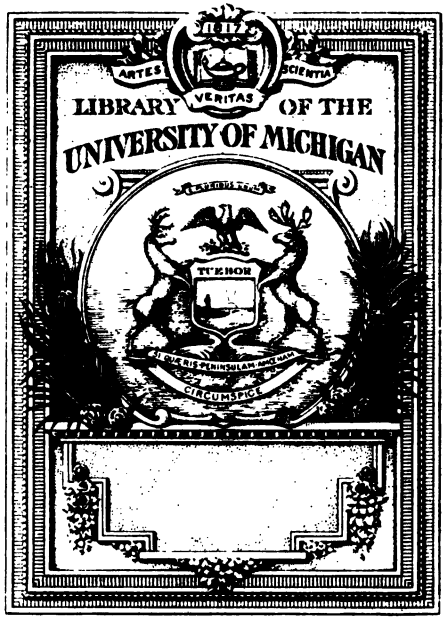
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THE

WORKS

793.1

Of the MOST REVEREND

Dr. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

IN TEN VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

EDINBURGH and GLASGOW:

Printed for G. HAMILTON & J. BALFOUR, W. SANDS, J. TRAILL, W. MILLER, and J. BROWN, *Edinburgh;* A. STALKER, *Glaſgow;* and T. GLAS, *Dundee.*

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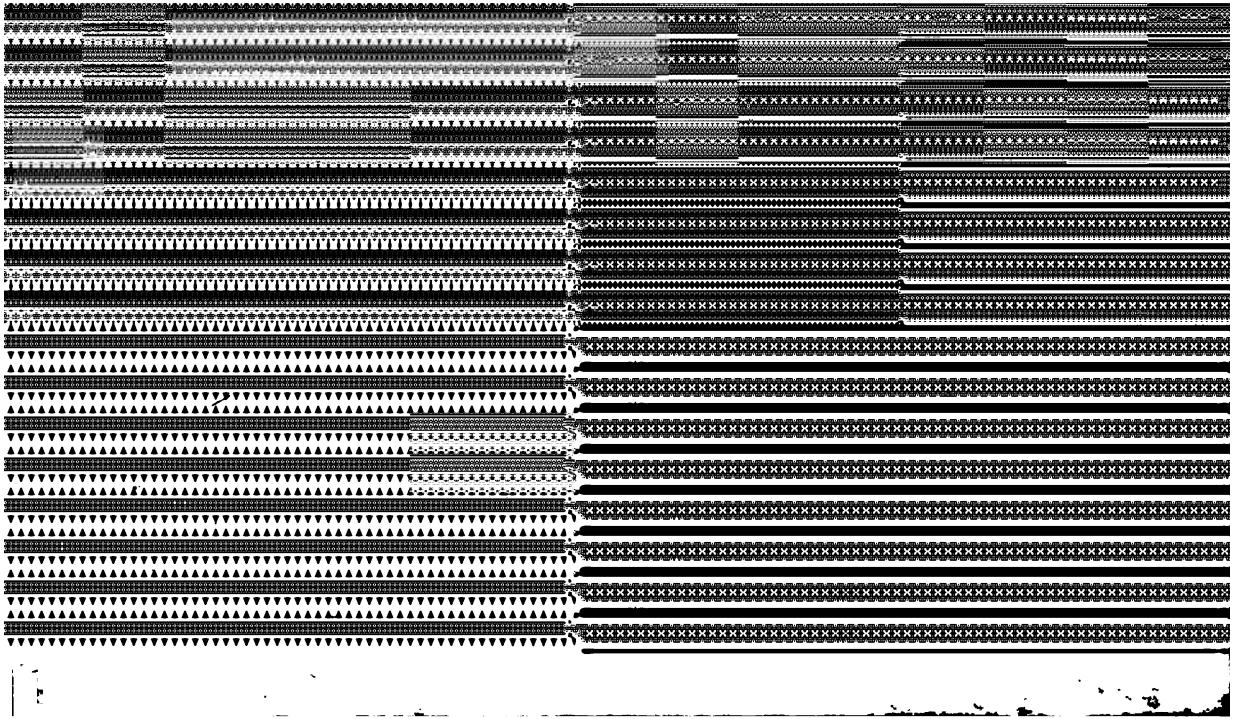

To the Worſhipful

The MASTERS of the BENCH,

AND

The reſt of the MEMBERS of the Honourable Society of LINCOLN'S-INN.

GENTLEMEN,

WHen I reſolved to publiſh theſe ſermons, there could be no diſpute to whom I ſhould dedicate them. They do of right belong to you, being moſt of them firſt preached among you; beſides my great obligation to you for your conſtant reſpects to me, both in the favourable acceptance, and in the generous encouragement of my labours, ever ſince I had the honour and happineſs to be related to you. In a thankful acknowledgment whereof I humbly preſent this ſmall part of them to you; hoping that, by the bleſſing of God, they may be of ſome uſe for the promoting of true piety and virtue; which is the ſincere wiſh and aim of,

Your moſt obliged

and faithful ſervant,

JOHN TILLOTSON.

THE

PREFACE.

I Shall neither trouble the reader, nor myſelf, with any apology for the publiſhing of theſe ſermons. For if they be in any meaſure truly ſerviceable to the end for which they are deſigned, to eſtabliſh men in the principles of religion, and to recommend to them the practice of it with any conſiderable advantage, I do not ſee what apology is neceſſary; and if they be not ſo, I am ſure none can be ſufficient. However, if there need any, the common heads of excuſe in theſe caſes are very well known; and I hope I have an equal right to them with other men.

I ſhall chuſe rather in this preface to give a ſhort account of the following diſcourſes; and, as briefly as I can, to vindicate a ſingle paſſage in the firſt of them from the exceptions of a Gentleman, who hath been pleaſed to honour it ſo far, as to write a whole book againſt it.

The deſign of theſe diſcourſes is fourfold.

1. *To ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of Atheiſm, and of ſcoffing at religion; which I am ſorry is ſo neceſſary to be done in this age. This I have endeavoured in the two firſt of theſe diſcourſes.*

2. *To recommend religion to men from the great and manifold advantages which it brings both to publick ſociety and to particular perſons. And this is the argument of the third and fourth.*

3. *To repreſent the excellency, more particularly, of the Chriſtian religion; and to vindicate the practice of it from the ſuſpicion of thoſe grievous troubles and difficulties which many imagine it to be attended withal. And this is the ſubject of the fifth and ſixth.*

4. *To perſuade men to the practice of this holy religion, from the great obligation which the profeſſion of Chriſtianity lays upon men to that purpoſe, and, more particularly, from the glorious rewards of another life; which is the deſign of the two next diſcourſes.*

Having given this ſhort account of the following diſcourſes, I crave leave of the reader to detain him a little longer, whilſt I vindicate a paſſage in the firſt of theſe ſermons from the aſſaults of a whole book purpoſely writ againſt it. The title of the book is, Faith vindicated from the poſſibility of falſhood. *The author, Mr. J. S. the famous author of* Sure footing. *He hath indeed, in this laſt book of his, to my great amazement, quitted that glorious title. Not that I dare aſſume to myſelf to have put him out of conceit with it, by having convinced him of the fantaſticalneſs of it. No; I deſpair to convince that man of any thing, who, after ſo fair an admonition, does ſtill perſiſt to maintain,* (Letter of thanks, p. 24. &c.), *that firſt and ſelf-evident principles not only may, but are fit to be demonſtrated; and* (ibid. p. 11.) *that thoſe ridiculous identical propoſitions,* That faith is faith, *and,* A rule is a rule, *are firſt principles in this controverſy of the* rule of faith, *without which nothing "can be ſolidly concluded either about "rule or faith." But there was another reaſon for his quitting of that title; and a prudent one indeed! He had forſaken the defence of* Sure footing, *and then it became convenient to lay aſide that title, for fear of putting people any more in mind of that book.*

I expected indeed, after his Letter of thanks, *in which he tells us,* p. 14. *he "intended to throw aſide the rubbiſh "of my book, that in his anſwer he might the better lay "open the fabrick of my diſcourſe, and have nothing there "to do, but to ſpeak to ſolid points;" I ſay, after this, I expected a full anſwer to the* ſolid points *(as he is pleaſed to call them) of my book; and that (according to his excellent method of* removing the rubbiſh, *in order to the pulling down of a building) the* fabrick *of my book would long ſince have been demoliſhed, and laid even with the ground. But eſpecially when, in the concluſion of that moſt civil and obliging letter, he threatened "never to leave following on his "blow, till he had either brought Dr. Still. and me to lay "principles that would bear the teſt, or it was made evi-"dent to all the world that we had none," I began, as I had reaſon, to be in a terrible fear of him, and to look upon myſelf as a dead man. And indeed who can think himſelf ſo conſiderable, as not to dread this mighty man of demonſtration, this prince of controvertiſts, this great lord and profeſſor*

professor of first principles? But I perceive, that great minds are merciful, and do sometimes content themselves to threaten, when they could destroy.

For, instead of returning a full answer to my book, he, according to their new mode of confuting books, manfully falls a-nibbling at one single passage in it, p. 118. [vol. 3. p. 308, 9. of this edition] ; *wherein he makes me to say, (for I say no such thing), that "the rule of Christian faith, "and consequently faith itself, is possible to be false." Nay in his* Letter of thanks, p. 13. *he says, "it is an avowed "position," in that place, "that faith is possible to be false." And to give the more countenance to this calumny, he chargeth the same* position (in equivalent terms) of the possible falshood of faith, and that as to the chiefest and most fundamental point, the tenet of a Deity, *upon the forementioned sermon. But because he knew in his conscience, that I had avowed no such position, he durst not cite the words either of my book or sermon, lest the reader should have discovered the notorious falshood and groundlessness of this calumny: nay, he durst not so much as refer to any particular place in my sermon where such a passage might be found. And yet this is the man that has the face to charge others with false citations; to which charge, before I have done, I shall say something, which, what effect soever it may have upon him, would make any other man sufficiently ashamed.*

But yet I must acknowledge, that in this position which he fastens upon me, he honours me with excellent company, my Lord Faulkland, Mr. Chillingworth, and Dr. Stillingfleet; persons of that admirable strength and clearness in their writings, that Mr. S. when he reflects upon his own style, and way of reasoning, may blush to acknowledge that ever he has read them. And as to this position which he charges them withal, I do not know (nor have the least reason upon Mr. S.'s word to believe) any such thing is maintained by them.

As for myself, whom I am now only concerned to vindicate, I shall set down the two passages, to which I suppose he refers.

In my sermon, [vol. 1. p. 32.] *I endeavour, among other things, to shew the unreasonableness of Atheism upon this account: "Because it requires more evidence for things*

" than they are capable of." To make this good, I diſcourſe thus: *" Ariſtotle hath long ſince obſerved, how unreaſonable it is to expect the ſame kind of proof for every thing, which we have for ſome things. Mathematical things, being of an abſtracted nature, are only capable of clear demonſtration. But concluſions in natural philoſophy are to be proved by a ſufficient induction of experiments; things of a moral nature, by moral arguments; and matters of fact, by credible teſtimony. And though none of theſe be ſtrict demonſtration, yet have we an undoubted aſſurance of them, when they are proved by the beſt arguments that the nature and quality of the thing will bear. None can demonſtrate to me, that there is ſuch an iſland in America as Jamaica; yet, upon the teſtimony of credible perſons, and authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as from doubting of the cleareſt mathematical demonſtration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm principle, by all thoſe who pretend to be certain of any thing at all, That when any thing is proved by as good arguments as that thing is capable of, and we have as great aſſurance that it is, as we could poſſibly have ſuppoſing it were, we ought not in reaſon to make any doubt of the exiſtence of that thing. Now to apply this to the preſent caſe: The being of God is not mathematically demonſtrable; nor can it be expected it ſhould; becauſe only mathematical matters admit of this kind of evidence. Nor can it be proved immediately by ſenſe; becauſe God being ſuppoſed to be a pure ſpirit, cannot be the object of any corporeal ſenſe. But yet we have as great aſſurance that there is a God, as the nature of the thing to be proved is capable of, and as we could in reaſon expect to have, ſuppoſing that he were."*

Upon this paſſage it muſt be, if any thing in the ſermon, that Mr. S. chargeth this poſition (in equivalent terms) of the poſſible falſhood of faith, and that as to the chiefeſt and moſt fundamental point, the tenet of a Deity. *And now I appeal to the reader's eyes and judgment, whether the ſum of what I have ſaid be not this, That though the exiſtence of God be not capable of that ſtrict kind of demonſtration which mathematical matters are; yet that we have an undoubted aſſurance of it. One would think, that*

no

no man could be ſo ridiculous, as from hence to infer, that I believe it poſſible, notwithſtanding this aſſurance, that there ſhould be no God. For however in many other caſes an undoubted aſſurance that a thing is, may not exclude all ſuſpicion of a poſſibility of its being otherwiſe; yet in this tenet of a Deity *it moſt certainly does: becauſe, whoever is aſſured that there is a God, is aſſured there is a being whoſe exiſtence is and always was neceſſary; and conſequently is aſſured that it is impoſſible he ſhould not be, and involves in it a contradiction. So that my diſcourſe is ſo far from being equivalent to the poſition he mentions, that it is a perfect contradiction to it. And he might with as much truth have affirmed, that I had expreſsly, and in ſo many words, ſaid, that there is no God.*

The other paſſage is in p. 118. [i. e. vol. 3. p. 308. 309.] *of my book, concerning* the rule of faith. *I was diſcourſing, that no man can "ſhew by any neceſſary argu-" ment, that it is naturally impoſſible that all the relations " concerning America ſhould be falſe. But yet* (ſay I) *I " ſuppoſe that, notwithſtanding this, no man in his wits is " now poſſeſſed with ſo incredible a folly, as to doubt whe-" ther there be ſuch a place. The caſe is the very ſame as " to the certainty of an ancient book, and of the ſenſe of " plain expreſſions. We have no demonſtration for theſe " things, and we expect none; becauſe we know the things " are not capable of it. We are not infallibly certain, that " any book is ſo ancient as it pretends to be; or that it was " written by him whoſe name it bears; or that this is the " ſenſe of ſuch and ſuch paſſages in it. It is poſſible all " this may be otherwiſe: but we are very well aſſured that " it is not; nor hath any prudent man any juſt cauſe to " make the leaſt doubt of it. For a bare poſſibility that a " thing may be, or not be, is no juſt cauſe of doubting whe-" ther a thing be or not. It is poſſible all the people in " France may die this night; but I hope the poſſibility of " this doth not incline any man in the leaſt to think that it " will be ſo. It is poſſible that the ſun may not riſe to-" morrow morning; yet, for all this, I ſuppoſe that no " man hath the leaſt doubt but that it will."*

To avoid the cavils of this impertinent man, I have tranſcribed the whole page to which he refers. And now, where is this avowed poſition of the poſſible falſhood of faith?

faith? *All that I ſay is this, That we are not infallible either in judging of the antiquity of a book, or of the ſenſe of it: by which I mean, (as any man of ſenſe and ingenuity would eaſily perceive I do), that we cannot demonſtrate theſe things ſo as to ſhew that the contrary neceſſarily involves a contradiction; but yet that we may have a firm aſſurance concerning theſe matters, ſo as not to make the leaſt doubt of them.*

And is this to avow the poſſible falſhood of faith? *and yet this poſition Mr. S. charges upon theſe words; how juſtly, I ſhall now examine.*

Either by faith *Mr. S. means the doctrine revealed by God; and then the meaning of the poſition muſt be, That what God ſays, is poſſible to be falſe; which is ſo abſurd a poſition, as can hardly enter into any man's mind; and yet Mr. S. hath the modeſty all along in his book to inſinuate, that in the forecited paſſage I ſay as much as this comes to.*

Or elſe Mr. S. means by faith, *the aſſent which we give to doctrines as revealed by God; and then his ſenſe of infallibility muſt be, either, that whoever aſſents to any thing as revealed by God, cannot be deceived, upon ſuppoſition that it is ſo revealed; or elſe abſolutely, that whoever aſſents to any thing as revealed by God, cannot be deceived. Now, although I do not, in the paſſage forecited, ſpeak one ſyllable concerning doctrines revealed by God; yet I affirm, (and ſo will any man elſe), that an aſſent to any doctrine as revealed by God, if it be revealed by him, is impoſſible to be falſe. But this is only an infallibility upon ſuppoſition; which amounts to no more than this, That if a thing be true, it is impoſſible to be falſe. And yet the principal deſign of Mr. S.'s book is to prove this, which I believe no man in the world was ever ſo ſenſeleſs as to deny. But if he mean abſolutely, that whoever aſſents to any doctrine as revealed by God, cannot be deceived; that is, that no man can be miſtaken about matters of faith, (as he muſt mean, if he pretend to have any adverſary, and do not fight only with his own ſhadow): this, I confeſs, is a very comfortable aſſertion, but I am much afraid it is not true.*

Or elſe, laſtly, by faith *he underſtands the means and motives of faith; and then the plain ſtate of the controverſy between us is this, Whether it be neceſſary to a Chriſtian belief, to be infallibly ſecured of the means whereby the Chriſtian*

Chriſtian doctrine is conveyed to us, and of the firmneſs of the motives upon which our belief of it is grounded? This indeed is ſomething to the purpoſe: for though, in the paſſage before cited, I ſay not one word concerning the motives of our belief of the Chriſtian doctrine; yet my diſcourſe there was intended to be applied to the means whereby the knowledge of this doctrine is conveyed to us. However, I am contented to join iſſue with Mr. S. upon both theſe points.

1. *That it is not neceſſary to the true nature of faith, that the motives upon which any man believes the Chriſtian doctrine ſhould be abſolutely concluſive, and impoſſible to be falſe. That it is neceſſary, Mr. S. ſeveral times affirms in his book; but how unreaſonably, appears from certain and daily experience. Very many Chriſtians, ſuch as St. Auſtin ſpeaks of, "as ſaved, not by the quickneſs of their underſtandings, but the ſimplicity of their belief," do believe the Chriſtian doctrine upon incompetent grounds; and their belief is true, though the argument upon which they ground it be not (as Mr. S. ſays) "abſolutely concluſive of the thing:" and he that thus believes the Chriſtian doctrine, if he adhere to it, and live accordingly, ſhall undoubtedly be ſaved; and yet I hope Mr. S. will not ſay, that any man ſhall be ſaved without true faith. I might add, that in this aſſertion Mr. S. is plainly contradicted by thoſe of his own church.*

For they generally grant, that general councils, though they be infallible in their definitions and concluſions, yet are not always ſo in their arguments and reaſonings about them. And the Guide of controverſies *expreſsly ſays,* p. 35. *that "it is not neceſſary that a divine faith ſhould always have "an external rationally infallible ground or motive thereto "(whether church-authority, or any other) on his part "that ſo believes." Here is a man of their own church avowing this poſition, That faith is poſſible to be falſe. I deſire Mr. S. who is the very rule of controverſy, to do juſtice upon this falſe* Guide.

I muſt acknowledge, that Mr. S. attempts to prove this aſſertion, and that by a very pleaſant and ſurpriſing argument; which is this. "The profound myſteries of faith "(he tells us, Faith vind. p. 90.) *muſt needs ſeem to "ſome* (viz. *thoſe who have no light but their pure natural reaſon, as he ſaid before,* p. 89.) *impoſſible to be "true;*

" true; which therefore nothing but a motive of its own " nature ſeemingly impoſſible to be falſe, can conquer, ſo " as to make them conceit them really true." What Mr. S. here means by a motive of its own nature ſeeming impoſſible to be falſe, *I cannot divine; unleſs he means a real ſeeming impoſſibility. But be that as it will, does Mr. S. in good earneſt believe, that* a motive of its own nature ſeeming impoſſible to be falſe, *is ſufficient to convince any man, that has and uſes* the light of natural reaſon, *of the truth of a thing* which muſt needs ſeem to him impoſſible to be true? *In my opinion, theſe two ſeeming impoſſibilities are ſo equally matched, that it muſt needs be a drawn battle between them. Suppoſe the thing to be believed be tranſubſtantiation; this indeed is a very profound myſtery, and is (to ſpeak in Mr. S.'s phraſe)* of its own nature ſo ſeemingly impoſſible, *that I know no argument in the world ſtrong enough to cope with it. And I challenge Mr. S. to inſtance in any motive of faith which is, both to our underſtanding and our ſenſes, more plainly impoſſible to be falſe, than their doctrine of tranſubſtantiation is evidently impoſſible to be true. And if he cannot, how can he reaſonably expect that any man in the world ſhould believe it?*

2. *That it is not neceſſary to the true nature of faith, that we ſhould be infallibly ſecured of the means whereby the Chriſtian doctrine is conveyed to us; particularly of the antiquity and authority of the books of ſcripture, and that the expreſſions in it cannot poſſibly bear any other ſenſe. And theſe are the very things I inſtance in, in the paſſage ſo often mentioned. And to theſe Mr. S. ought to have ſpoken, if he intended to have confuted that paſſage. But he was reſolved not to ſpeak diſtinctly, knowing his beſt play to be in the dark, and that all his ſafety lay in the confuſion and obſcurity of his talk.*

Now, that to have an infallible ſecurity in theſe particulars is not neceſſary to the true nature of faith, is evident upon theſe two accounts; becauſe faith may be without this infallible ſecurity; and becauſe, in the particulars mentioned, it is impoſſible to be had.

1. *Becauſe faith may be without this infallible ſecurity. He that is ſo aſſured of the antiquity and authority of the books of ſcripture, and of the ſenſe of thoſe texts wherein the*

the doctrines of Christianity are plainly delivered, as to see no just cause to doubt thereof, may really assent to those doctrines, though he have no infallible security. And an assent so grounded I affirm to have the true nature of faith. For what degree of assent, and what security of the means which convey to us the knowledge of Christianity, are necessary to the true nature of faith, is to be estimated from the end of faith, which is, the salvation of mens souls. And whoever is so assured of the authority and sense of scripture, as to believe the doctrine of it, and to live accordingly, shall be saved. And surely such a belief as will save a man, hath the true nature of faith, though it be not infallible. And if God have sufficiently provided for the salvation of men of all capacities, it is no such reflexion upon the goodness and wisdom of providence *as Mr. S. imagines, that he hath not taken care that every man's faith should arrive to the degree of infallibility; nor does our blessed Saviour, for not having made this provision, deserve "to be esteemed by all "the world, not a wise lawgiver, but a mere ignoramus "and impostor," as one of his fellow-controvertists* (Labyrinthus Cantuarienſis, p. 77.) *speaks with reverence.*

Besides, this assertion, That infallibility is necessary to the true nature of that assent which we call faith, is plainly false upon another account also; because faith admits of degrees, but infallibility has none. The scripture speaks of a weak and a strong faith, and of the increase of faith; but I never heard of a weak and strong infallibility. Infallibility is the highest perfection of the knowing faculty, and consequently the firmest degree of assent, upon the firmest grounds, and which are known to be so. But will Mr. S. say, that the highest degree of assent admits of degrees, and is capable of increase? Infallibility is an absolute impossibility of being deceived. Now, I desire Mr. S. to shew me the degrees of absolute impossibility; and if he could do that, and consequently there might be degrees of infallibility, yet I cannot believe that Mr. S. would think fit to call any degree of infallibility a weak faith or assent.

2. *Because an infallible security in the particulars mentioned, is impossible to be had; I mean in an ordinary way, and without miracle and particular revelation; because the nature of the thing is incapable of it. The utmost security we have of the antiquity of any book, is human testimony:*

and all human teſtimony is fallible, for this plain reaſon, becauſe all men are fallible. And though Mr. S. in defence of his beloved tradition, is pleaſed to ſay, that human teſtimony in ſome caſes is infallible; yet I think no man before him was ever ſo hardy, as to maintain, that the teſtimony of fallible men is infallible. I grant it to be in many caſes certain; that is, ſuch as a conſiderate man may prudently rely and proceed upon, and hath no juſt cauſe to doubt of; and ſuch as none but an obſtinate man or a fool can deny. And that thus the learned men of his own church define certainty, *Mr. S. (if he would but vouchſafe to read ſuch books) might have learned from Melchior Canus*; who, ſpeaking of the firmneſs of human teſtimony in ſome caſes, (which yet he did not believe to be infallible) defines it thus: "Thoſe things are certain among men, which cannot be denied without obſtinacy and folly." I know Mr. S. is pleaſed to ſay, that certainty and infallibility are all one; and he is the firſt man that I know of that ever ſaid it. And yet perhaps ſome body may have been before him in it; or I remember Tully ſays, that "there is nothing ſo fooliſh, "but ſome philoſopher or other has ſaid it." I am ſure Mr. S.'s own philoſopher, Mr. White, contradicts him in this moſt clearly, in his preface to Ruſhworth's dialogues; where, explicating the term* moral certainty, *he tells us, that "ſome underſtood by it ſuch a certainty as makes the cauſe "always work the ſame effect, though it take not away the "abſolute poſſibility of working otherwiſe;" and this, preſently after he tells us, "ought abſolutely to be reckoned in "the degree of true certainty, and the authors conſidered as "miſtaken in undervaluing it." So that, according to Mr. White, true certainty may conſiſt with a poſſibility of the contrary; and conſequently Mr. S. is miſtaken, in thinking certainty and infallibility to be all one. Nay, I do not find any two of them agreeing among themſelves about the notions of infallibility and certainty. Mr. White ſays, that what ſome call* moral certainty, *is true certainty, though it do not take away a poſſibility of the contrary. Mr. S. aſſerts the direct contrary, that moral certainty is only probability, becauſe it does not take away the poſſibility of the contrary.*

* De loc. theol. lib. 11. c. 4. Certa apud homines ea ſunt, quæ negari ſine pervicacia & ſtultitia non poſſunt.

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The Guide in controverſies, p. 135. *differs from them both, and makes* moral, certain, *and* infallible, *all one. I deſire that they would agree theſe matters among themſelves, before they quarrel with us about them.*

In brief, then, though moral certainty *be ſometimes taken for a high degree of probability, which can only produce a doubtful aſſent; yet it is alſo frequently uſed for a firm and undoubted aſſent to a thing upon ſuch grounds as are fit fully to ſatisfy a prudent man; and in this ſenſe I have always uſed this term. But now infallibility is an abſolute ſecurity of the underſtanding from all poſſibility of miſtake in what it believes. And there are but two ways for the underſtanding to be thus ſecured; either by the perfection of its own nature, or by ſupernatural aſſiſtance. But no human underſtanding being abſolutely ſecured from poſſibility of miſtake by the perfection of its own nature, (which I think all mankind except Mr. S. have hitherto granted), it follows, that no man can be infallible in any thing, but by ſupernatural aſſiſtance. Nor did ever the church of Rome pretend to infallibility upon any other account, as every one knows that hath been converſant in the writings of their learned men. And Mr. Creſſy, in his anſwer to Dr. Pierce,* p. 88. 89. *hath not the face to contend for any other infallibility but this, that "the immutable God can actually preſerve a mu-" table creature from actual mutation." But I can by no means agree with him in what immediately follows, concerning the omniſcience of a creature; that "God, who is ab-" ſolutely omniſcient, can teach a rational creature all " truths neceſſary or expedient to be known; ſo that though " a man may have much ignorance, yet he may be in a ſort " omniſcient within a determinate ſphere."* Omniſcient within a determinate ſphere, *is an infinite within a finite ſphere; and is not that a very pretty ſort of knowing all things, which may conſiſt with an ignorance of many things? Of all the controvertiſts I have met with, except Mr. S. Mr. Creſſy is the happieſt at theſe ſmart and ingenious kind of reaſonings.*

As to the other particular, of the ſenſe of books, it is likewiſe plainly impoſſible that any thing ſhould be delivered in ſuch clear and certain words as are abſolutely incapable of any other ſenſe; and yet, notwithſtanding this, the meaning of them may be ſo plain, as that any unprejudiced and

reasonable man may certainly understand them. How many definitions and axioms, &c. *are there in Euclid, in the sense of which men are universally agreed, and think themselves undoubtedly certain of it? and yet the words in which they are expressed, may possibly bear another sense. The same may be said concerning the doctrines and precepts of the holy scriptures: and one great reason why men do not so generally agree in the sense of these as of the other, is, because the interests, and lusts, and passions of men are more concerned in the one than the other. But whatever uncertainty there may be in the sense of any text of scripture, oral tradition is so far from affording us any help in this case, that it is a thousand times more uncertain, and less to be trusted to; especially if we may take that to be the traditionary sense of texts of scripture, which we meet with in the decretals of their Popes, and the acts of some of their councils; than which never was any thing in the whole world more absurd and ridiculous: and whence may we expect to have the infallible traditional sense of scripture, if not from the heads and representatives of their church?*

This may abundantly suffice for the vindication of that passage which Mr. S. makes such a rude clamour about, as if I had therein denied the truth and certainty of all religion; but durst never trust the reader with a view of those words of mine upon which he pretended to ground this calumny. But the world understands well enough, that all this was but a shift of Mr. S.'s, for the satisfaction of his own party, and a pitiful art to avoid the vindication of Sure footing, *a task he had no mind to undertake.*

And yet the main design of this book, which he calls Faith vindicated, *&c. is to prove that which I do not believe any man living ever denied*, viz. *That what is true is not possible to be false: which though it be one of the plainest truths in the world, yet he proves it so foolishly, as would make any man (if it were not evident of itself) to doubt of it. He proves it from logick, and nature, and metaphysicks, and ethicks*, &c. *I wonder he did not do it likewise from arithmetick and geometry, the principles whereof, he tells us*, (Sure footing, p. 93.), "*are concerned in demonstrating "the certainty of oral tradition.*" *He might also have proceeded to astrology, and palmistry, and chymistry, and have shewn how each of these lend their assistance to the evi-*

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ducing of this truth. For that could not have been more ridiculous, than his argument (Faith vindic. p. 6. 7. &c.) *from the nature of* ſubject, *and* predicate, *and* copula in faith-propoſitions; *becauſe, forſooth, whoever affirms any propoſition of faith to be true, affirms it impoſſible to be falſe. Very true. But would any man argue, that what is true is impoſſible to be falſe, from the nature of* ſubject, predicate, *and* copula? *for be the propoſition true or falſe, theſe are of the ſame nature in both; that is, they are* ſubject, predicate, *and* copula.

But that the reader may have a taſte of his clear ſtyle, and way of reaſoning, I ſhall for his ſatisfaction tranſcribe Mr. S.'s whole argument from the nature of the predicate. *His words are theſe,* p. 9. 10. 11. 12. "*Our argument* "*from the* copula *is particularly ſtrengthened from the na-* "*ture of the* predicate *in the propoſitions we ſpeak of; I* "*mean, in ſuch ſpeeches as affirm ſuch and ſuch points of* "*faith to be true. For* true *means* exiſtent *in propoſitions* "*which expreſs only the* An eſt *of a thing, as moſt points* "*of faith do; which ſpeak abſtractedly, and tell not* "*wherein the nature of the ſubject it ſpeaks of conſiſts, or* "*the* Quid eſt. *So that moſt of the propoſitions Chriſtians* "*are bound to profeſs, are fully expreſſed thus:* A Trini- "ty is exiſtent, &c. *And the like may be ſaid of thoſe* "*points which belong to a thing or action paſt; as,* Crea- "tion was, &c. *For* exiſtent *is the predicate in theſe two,* "*only affixed to another difference of time; and it is equal-* "*ly impoſſible ſuch ſubjects ſhould* neither have been *nor* "not have been, *or* have been *and* have not been *at* "*once; as it is that a thing ſhould neither* be *nor* not be "*at preſent, or both* be *and* not be *at preſent. Regard-* "*ing then ſtedfaſtly the nature of our predicate* [exiſtent], "*we ſhall find that it expreſſes the utmoſt actuality of a* "*thing; and as taken in the poſture it bears in thoſe pro-* "*poſitions, that actually* exerciſed, *that is, the utmoſt a-* "*ctuality in its moſt actual ſtate; that is, as abſolutely* "*excluding all manner or leaſt degree of potentiality, and* "*conſequently all poſſibility of being otherwiſe; which is* "*radically deſtroyed when all potentiality is taken away.* "*This diſcourſe holding, which in right to truth I ſhall not* "*fear to affirm (unconcerned in the drollery of any oppoſer)* "*to be more than mathematically* demonſtrative; *it follows*

" *inevitably, that whoſo is bound to profeſs a* Trinity, incarnation, *&c.* is or was exiſtent, *is alſo bound to profeſs that it is* impoſſible they ſhould be not exiſtent; " *or, which is all one, that it is impoſſible theſe points of* " *faith ſhould be falſe.*

" *The ſame appears out of the nature of* diſtinction *or* " diviſion *applied to our predicate* exiſtent, *as found in* " *theſe propoſitions: for could that predicate bear a perti-* " *nent diſtinction, expreſſing this and the other reſpect, or* " thus *and* thus, *it might poſſible* be *according to one of* " *theſe reſpects, or thus* conſidered, *and* not be *according* " *to another; that is,* another way conſidered: *but this* " *evaſion is here impoſſible; for either thoſe diſtinguiſhing* " *notions muſt be more potential or antecedent to the notion* " *of* exiſtent; *and then they neither reach* exiſtent, *nor* " *ſuperveen to it as its determinations or actuations, which* " *differences ought to do; nor can any notion be more* actual " *or* determinative *in the line of* ſubſtance *or being, than* " exiſtent *is; and ſo fit to diſtinguiſh it in that line: nor,* " *laſtly, can any determination in the line of accidents ſerve* " *the turn; for thoſe ſuppoſe exiſtence already put, and ſo* " *the whole truth of the propoſition entire and compleat an-* " *tecedently to them. It is impoſſible therefore that what* " *is thus affirmed to be* true, *ſhould in* any regard *be af-* " *firmed* poſſible to be falſe; *the impoſſibility of diſtinguiſh-* " *ing the predicate pertinently excluding here all poſſibility* " *of divers reſpects.*

" *The ſame is demonſtrated from the impoſſibility of diſ-* " *tinguiſhing the ſubjects of thoſe faith-propoſitions; for* " *thoſe ſubjects being propoſitions themſelves, and accepted* " *for* truths, *as is ſuppoſed, they are incapable of diſtin-* " *ction, as ſhall be particularly ſhewn hereafter. Beſides,* " *thoſe ſubjects being points of faith, and ſo ſtanding in* " *the abſtract; that is, not deſcending to ſubſuming re-* " *ſpects; even in that regard too they are freed from all* " *pertinent diſtinguiſhableneſs.*

" *The ſame is demonſtrated from the nature of* truth, " *which conſiſts in an indiviſible; whence there is nothing of* " truth *had, how great ſoever the conceived approaches to-* " *wards it may be, till all* may-not-bees, *or potentiality* " *to be otherwiſe, be utterly excluded by the actuality of* " *is, or exiſtence; which put or diſcovered, the light of*

" truth

" truth *breaks forth, and the dim twilights of* may-not-
" bees *vaniſh and diſappear.*"

I have here, reader, preſented thee with a diſcourſe which (if we may believe Mr. S.) " *is more than mathe-*
" *matically demonſtrative.*" *A rare ſight indeed! And is not this a pleaſant man, and of good aſſurance? I now find it true, which he ſays elſewhere,* (Letter of thanks, p. 1.), *that* " *principles are of an inflexible* genius, *and* " *ſelf-confident too; and that they love naturally to expreſs* " *themſelves with an aſſuredneſs.*" *But certainly the ſacred names of* principles *and* demonſtration *were never ſo profaned by any man before. Might not any one write a book of ſuch jargon, and call it* demonſtration? *And would it not equally ſerve to prove or confute? If he intended this ſtuff for the ſatisfaction of the people, he might as well have writ in the Coptick or Sclavonian language: yet I cannot deny, but that it is very ſuitable to the principles of the Roman church; for why ſhould not their ſcience, as well as their ſervice, be in an unknown tongue; that the one may be as fit to improve their knowledge, as the other is to raiſe their devotion? But if he deſigned this for the learned, nothing could be more improper; for they are far leſs apt to admire nonſenſe than the common people: and I deſire that no man (how learned ſoever he may think himſelf) would be over-confident, that this is ſenſe. I do verily believe, that neither Harphius nor Ruſbrochius, nor the profound mother Juliana, have any thing in their writings more ſenſeleſs and obſcure than this diſcourſe of his, which he affirms to be* " *more than mathematically demonſtrative.*" *So that, if I were worthy to adviſe Mr. S. he ſhould give over this pretence to ſcience; for whatever he may think, his talent certainly does not lie that way; but he ſeems to be as well made for a myſtical divine, as any man I know. And methinks his ſuperiors ſhould be ſenſible of this, and employ him to write about the* deiform ſund of the ſoul, *the* ſuper-eſſential life, *the* method of ſelf-annihilation, *and the* paſſive unions of nothing with nothing. *Theſe are profound ſubjects, and he hath a ſtyle peculiarly fitted for them. For even in this parcel of ſtuff which I have now cited, there are five or ſix words, ſuch as,* may-not-bees, potentiality, actuality, actuation, determinative, ſuperveen, *and* ſubſume, *which (if they were but well*

mingled and diſcreetly ordered, and brought in now and then with a that is, *to explain one another) would half ſet up a man in that way, and enable him to write as myſtical a diſcourſe as a man would wiſh. But enough of this. And I have treſpaſſed not a little upon mine own diſpoſition in ſaying thus much, though out of a juſt indignation at confident nonſenſe.*

It is time now to draw towards a concluſion of this debate. I ſhall only leave with the reader a few obſervations concerning this book of Mr. S.'s, and his doctrine of infallibility.

1. *That the main drift of his book being to prove, that what is true is impoſſible to be falſe, he oppoſes no body that I know of in this matter.*

2. *That in aſſerting infallibility to be neceſſary to the true nature of faith, he hath the generality of his own church his profeſſed adverſaries. The church of Rome never arrogated to herſelf any other infallibility but what ſhe pretends to be founded upon Chriſt's promiſe to ſecure his church always from error by a ſupernatural aſſiſtance; which is widely different from Mr. S.'s rational infallibility of oral tradition. Mr. S. ſurely cannot be ignorant, that the divines of their church (till Mr. Ruſhworth and Mr. White found out this new way) did generally reſolve faith into the infallible teſtimony of the church; and the infallibility of their church, into our Saviour's promiſe; and the evidence of the true church, into the marks of the church, or the motives of credibility; which motives are acknowledged to be only prudential, and not demonſtrative. Bellarmine ſays,* (l. 4. de eccleſ.), *that the marks of the church do not make it evidently true, which is the true church, but only evidently credible; "and that (ſays he) is ſaid to be evidently "credible, which is neither ſeen in itſelf, nor in its prin-"ciples; but yet hath ſo many and ſo weighty teſtimonies, "that every wiſe man hath reaſon to believe it." Becanus* (Sum. tom. 2. partic. de fide, c. 1.) *to the ſame purpoſe, that "the motives of credibility are only the foundation of "a prudent, but not of an infallible aſſent." I know very well that Mr Knott, and ſome others, would fain perſuade us, that an aſſent* in ſome ſort *infallible may be built upon prudential motives; which is as abſurd as it is poſſible: but if it were true, yet Mr. S. would not accept of this* ſort

of

of infallibility; nothing leſs will ſerve him than demonſtrative motives, *and ſuch as are* abſolutely concluſive of the thing. *Stapleton (as Mr. Creſſy tells us) expreſsly ſays, that ſuch an infallible certitude of means is not now neceſſary to the paſtors of the church, as was neceſſary to the Apoſtles, who were the firſt founders of the church. So that, according to theſe authors, there may be true faith where neither the means nor the motives of it are ſuch as to raiſe our aſſent to the degree of infallibility. And this is as much to the full as any Proteſtant (that I know of) ever ſaid. Nay, even his friends of the tradition, Mr. Ruſhworth, Mr. White, and Mr. Creſſy, are guilty of the ſame* damnable and fundamental error, *as Mr. S. calls it,* (Letter to his anſwerer, p. 5.). *For they grant leſs aſſurance than that which is infallible, to be ſufficient to Chriſtian faith, and that we are juſtly condemned if we refuſe to believe upon ſuch evidence as does ordinarily ſatisfy prudent men in human affairs. And particularly Mr. White makes a queſtion, whether human nature be capable of infallibility? as I have ſhewn at large, by clear and full teſtimonies out of each of theſe authors, in the* Anſwer to Sure footing, [vol. 3. p. 309. & ſeqq.]. *Of which teſtimonies, though Mr. S. has not thought fit to take the leaſt notice throughout his book; yet I cannot but think it a reaſonable requeſt, to deſire him to vindicate the divines of his own church (eſpecially thoſe of his own way) from theſe things, before he charge us any farther with them.*

3. *That Mr. S. by this principle, That infallibility is neceſſary to the true nature of faith, makes every true believer infallible in matters of faith; which is ſuch a paradox, as I doubt whether ever it entered into any other man's mind. But if it be true, what need then of any infallibility in Pope or council? And if this infallibility be grounded upon the nature of oral tradition, what need of ſupernatural aſſiſtance? I doubt Mr. S. would be loth to preach this doctrine at Rome; I have often heard, that there is an old teſty Gentleman lives there, who would take it very ill that any one beſides himſelf ſhould pretend to be infallible.*

4. *That Mr. S. by his principles does plainly exclude from ſalvation the generality of his own church, that is,*

all that do not believe upon his grounds. And this is the neceſſary conſequence of his reaſoning in a late treatiſe, intitled, The method to arrive at ſatisfaction in religion. *The principles whereof are theſe: "That the church is a congregation of faithful; The faithful are thoſe who have true faith; That, till it be known which is the true faith, it cannot be known which is the true church; That which is the true faith, can only be known by the true rule of faith, which is oral tradition; and, That the infallibility of this rule is evident to common ſenſe." And from theſe principles he concludes, (§ 21.) "that thoſe who follow not this rule, and ſo are out of this church, can have no true faith; and that though many of the points to which they aſſent are true, yet their aſſent is not faith: for faith (ſpeaking of Chriſtian faith) is an aſſent which cannot poſſibly be falſe." So that the foundation of this method is the ſelf-evident infallibility of oral tradition, which hath been ſufficiently conſidered in the* Anſwer to Sure footing, *which yet remains unanſwered. That which I am now concerned to take notice of, is, the conſequence of this method, which does at one blow excommunicate and unchriſtian the far greateſt part of his own church. For if all who do not follow oral tradition as their only rule of faith are out of the church, and can have no true faith, then all who follow the council of Trent are* ipſo facto *no Chriſtians. For nothing is plainer, than that that council did not make oral tradition the ſole rule of their faith, nor rely upon it as ſuch; which hath been proved at large in the* Anſwer to Sure footing.

But why is Mr. S. ſo zealous in this matter of infallibility? There is a plain reaſon for it. He finds that confidence, how weakly ſoever it be grounded, hath ſome effect upon the common and ignorant people; who are apt to think there is ſomething more than ordinary in a ſwaggering man, that talks of nothing but principles and demonſtration. And ſo we ſee it in ſome other profeſſions. There are a ſort of people very well known, who find, that the moſt effectual way to cheat the people, is always to pretend to infallible *cures.*

I have now done with his infallibility. But I muſt not forget his Letter of thanks. *I ſhall wholly paſs by the paſſion and ill language of it, which a man may plainly ſee*

to

to have proceeded from a galled and uneasy mind. He would fain put on some pleasantness, but was not able to conceal his vexation. Nor shall I insist upon his palpable shuffling about the explication of the terms rule *and* faith. *He was convinced, that he had explained them very untowardly, and therefore would gladly come off by saying,* (p. 7.), *that he did not intend explication, but only to predicate or affirm something of them. And yet the whole design of the first page of* Sure footing, *is, to shew the necessity of beginning with* the meaning of those words which express the thing under debate. *And this method he tells us he will* apply to his present purpose, *and will* examine well *what is meant by those* words *which express the thing he was to discuss, namely,* the rule of faith. *Now, if to* examine well what is meant by words, *be not to go about to explain them, I must confess myself to be in a great error. Of the same kind is his apology for his testimonies, as if they were* (p. 105.) not intended against the Protestants; *whereas his book was writ against the Protestants; and when he comes to his testimonies,* (Sure footing, p. 126.), *he declares the design of them to be, to* second by authority, *what he had before established by* reason. *So that if the rational part of his book was intended against the Protestants, and the testimonies were designed to second it, I cannot understand why he should say one was less intended against them than the other. But it seems he is so conscious of the weakness of those testimonies, that he does not think them fit to satisfy any but those who believe him already.*

As to his charge of false citations, it is but the common artifice of the Roman controvertists, when they have nothing else to say. However, that the world may see how little he is to be trusted, I shall instance in two or three, about which he makes the loudest clamour, and leave it to the reader to judge by these, of his sincerity in the rest.

He says, I notoriously abuse the preface to Rushworth's dialogues, in citing the author of it, [vol. 3. p. 316.], *to say, that* "such certainty as makes the cause always "to work the same effect, though it take not away the ab- "solute possibility of working otherwise, ought absolutely to "be reckoned in the degree of true certainty;" *whereas (says Mr. S.) he only tells us there,* p. 7. *that* "by "moral

" *moral certainty* ſome underſtood *ſuch a certainty as* " *makes the cauſe*, &c." *To vindicate myſelf in this, I ſhall only ſet the author's words before the reader's eyes. They are theſe:* " *This term* moral certainty, *every one* " *explicated not alike; but ſome underſtood by it ſuch a* " *certainty as makes the cauſe always work the ſame ef-* " *fect, though it take not away the abſolute poſſibility of* " *working otherwiſe. Others called that a* moral certain- " ty *which proceeds from*, &c. *A third explication of* " *this word is*, &c. *Of theſe three the firſt ought ab-* " *ſolutely to be reckoned in the degree of true certainty,* " *and the authors conſidered as miſtaken in undervaluing* " *it.*" *Is this only to tell us, that by moral certainty* ſome underſtood, *&c.? Does not the preface alſo expreſsly affirm, that what theſe* ſome underſtood by moral certainty, ought abſolutely to be reckoned in the degree of true certainty? *which is the very thing I cited him for.*

Another heavy charge is, that, according to my uſual ſincerity, *I quote Ruſhworth's nephew to ſay*, [vol. 3. p. 322.], *that a few good words are to be caſt in concerning ſcripture*, " *for the ſatisfaction of indifferent men who* " *have been brought up in this verbal and apparent reſpect* " *of the ſcripture;*" " *whereas (ſays Mr. S.) in the* " *place you cite, he only expreſſes, it would be a ſatisfa-* " *ction to indifferent men to ſee the poſitions one would in-* " *duce them to embrace, maintainable by ſcripture.*" *Does he only ſay ſo? let the reader judge. The words in Mr. Ruſhworth*, p. 76. 77. *are theſe:* "*Yet this I muſt tell ye,* " *that it were a great ſatisfaction for indifferent men, that* " *have been brought up in this verbal and apparent reſpect* " *of the ſcripture, to ſee that the poſitions you would in-* " *duce them unto, can be, and are maintained by ſcripture,* " *and that they are grounded therein.*" *Certainly one would think, that either this man has no eyes, or no forehead.*

But the greateſt outcry of all is, that I abuſe his firſt demonſtration, by virtue of a direct falſification both of his words and ſenſe, by cogging in the word all, *making his principle run thus, that* " *the greateſt hopes and fears are* " *applied to the minds of* [*all*] *Chriſtians.*" *This indeed I make to be his principle, grounded upon his words which I had cited a little before*, [vol. 3. p. 330.]. *And they are theſe.* " 1. *That Chriſtian doctrine was at firſt un-*

" *animouſly*

" animouſly ſettled by the Apoſtles in the hearts of the " faithful, diſperſed in great multitudes over ſeveral parts " of the world. 2. That this doctrine was firmly believed " by ALL thoſe faithful to be the way to heaven, and the " contradicting or deſerting of it to be the way to damna- " tion: ſo that the greateſt hopes and fears imaginable " were, by engaging the divine authority, ſtrongly applied " to the minds of the firſt believers," &c. *Now, if theſe* firſt believers, *to whom he ſays theſe* hopes and fears were ſtrongly applied, *be* all thoſe faithful *he ſpoke of before, which were* diſperſed over ſeveral parts of the world, *as the tenor of his words plainly ſhews, what are theſe leſs than all the Chriſtians of that age? And he himſelf a little after tells us, there is the ſame reaſon of the following ages. So that I made* his principle run no otherwiſe *than he himſelf had laid it. And if it contradict what he ſays elſewhere, it is no new or ſtrange thing. I wonder more at his confidence in charging ſuch falſifications upon me, as every man's eyes will preſently confute him in. Methinks, though a man had all ſcience, and all principles; yet it might not be amiſs to have ſome conſcience.*

I ſhall only ſpeak a few words to the two ſolid points, *as I may call them, of his* Letter; *and I have done.*

I had charged him, that he makes traditious certainty a firſt and ſelf-evident principle, and yet that he goes about to demonſtrate it; which I ſaid was impoſſible to be done; and if it could be done, was needleſs. To avoid this inconvenience which he found himſelf ſorely preſſed withal, he diſtinguiſhes between ſpeculative and practical ſelf-evidence; and ſays, that things which are practically ſelf-evident may be demonſtrated, but thoſe that are ſpeculatively ſo, cannot. But he muſt not think to ſhelter himſelf from ſo palpable an abſurdity by this impertinent diſtinction. For, let things be evident how they will, ſpeculatively or practically, it is plain, that if they be principles evident of themſelves, they need nothing to evidence them; and if they be firſt principles, there can be nothing to make them more evident, becauſe there is nothing before them to demonſtrate them by. Now, if Mr. S. had in truth believed that the certainty of tradition was a firſt and ſelf-evident principle, he ſhould by all means have let it alone; for it was in a very good condition to ſhift for itſelf: but his blind way of demonſtration,

is enough to caſt a miſt about the cleareſt truth in the world. But perhaps, by the ſelf-evident certainty of tradition, Mr. S. only means that it is evident to himſelf; for I dare ſay, it is ſo to no body elſe. And if that be his meaning, he did well enough to endeavour to demonſtrate it; it was no more than needed.

The other point is about his firſt principles; ſuch as theſe, A rule is a rule, Faith is faith, *&c. which he ſays,* p. 11. "*muſt principle all that can be ſolidly concluded either a-*"*bout rule or faith.*" *Of theſe he hath mighty ſtore, and bleſſeth himſelf in it, as the rich man in the goſpel did in his full barns,* Soul, take thine eaſe, thou haſt *principles* laid up for many years; *and out of an exceſs of good nature pities my caſe,* p. 74. *who did* "*undertake to write a* "*diſcourſe about the ground of faith, without ſo much as* "*one principle to bleſs myſelf with.*" *But the miſchief is, that after all this ſtir about them, they are good for nothing; and of the very ſame ſtamp with that frivolous one Ariſtotle* (Analyt. Paſtor. l. 7.) *ſpeaks of,* If a thing be, it is, *which he rejects as a vain and ridiculous propoſition. Such are Mr. S.'s firſt principles,* ſurfeited of too much truth, *(as an ingenious writer of his own church ſays of them), and ready to burſt with ſelf-evidence; and yet by ten thouſand of them a man ſhall not be able to advance one ſtep in knowledge, becauſe they produce no concluſion but themſelves; whereas it is of the nature of principles to yield a concluſion different from themſelves. And to convince Mr. S. fully of the foolery of theſe principles, I will try what can be done with them either in a categorical or hypothetical ſyllogiſm,* e. g. "*A rule is a rule; tradition is* "*a rule:* ergo, *tradition is a rule.*" *Again,* "*If a rule* "*be a rule, then a rule is a rule; but a rule is a rule:* "ergo." *How is any man the wiſer for all this? But it may be Mr. S. can make better work with them, and manage them more dexterouſly, ſo as to* principle *any thing that can be* ſolidly concluded *in any controverſy.*

And now I hope at laſt to have given Mr. S. full ſatisfaction; ſince he has brought me to the very point he deſired, to acknowledge that I have no principles. *And indeed, if there be no other to be had, but ſuch as theſe, I do declare to all the world, that I neither have any principles, nor will have any.*

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The CONTENTS.

SERMON I. The wiſdom of being religious.——Job xxviii. 28. *And unto man he ſaid, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom; and to depart from evil, is underſtanding* pag. 1

SERM. II. The folly of ſcoffing at religion.——2 Pet. iii. 3. *Knowing this firſt, that there ſhall come in the laſt days ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts* 55

SERM. III. The advantages of religion to ſocieties.——Prov. xiv. 34. *Righteouſneſs exalteth a nation; but ſin is the reproach of any people* 70

SERM. IV. The advantages of religion to particular perſons.——Pſal. xix. 11. *And in keeping of them there is great reward* 81

SERM. V. The excellency of the Chriſtian religion.——Philip. iii. 8. *Yea doubtleſs, and I count all things but loſs, for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus my Lord* 95

SERM. VI. The precepts of Chriſtianity not grievous.——1 John v. 3.——*And his commandments are not grievous* 113

SERM. VII. Of the obligation of Chriſtians to a holy life.——2 Tim. ii. 19. *Let every one that nameth the name of Chriſt depart from iniquity* 129

SERM. VIII. Of the happineſs of a heavenly converſation.——Phil. iii. 20. *For our converſation is in heaven* 144

SERM. IX. Of the end of judgments, and the reaſon of their continuance.——Iſ. ix. 12. 13. *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill. For the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of hoſts* 162

SERM. X. Of the deceitfulneſs and danger of ſin.——Heb. iii. 13. *Exhort one another daily while it is called, To-day; leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin* 176

SERM. XI. The hazard of being ſaved in the church of Rome,——1 Cor. iii. 15. *But he himſelf ſhall be ſaved; yet ſo, as by fire* 189

SERM. XII. Of the inward peace and pleasure which attends religion.——Psal. cxix. 165. *Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them* 207

SERM. XIII. The nature and benefit of consideration.——Psal. cxix. 59. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies* 223

SERM. XIV. The folly and danger of irresolution and delaying.——Psal. cxix. 60. *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments* 239

SERM. XV. The distinguishing character of a good and a bad man.——1 John iii. 10. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God* 253

SERM. XVI. Of the joy which is in heaven at the repentance of a sinner.——Luke xv. 7. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance* 274

SERM. XVII. Of the sin against the Holy Ghost.——Matth. xii. 31. 32. *Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come* 289

SERM. XVIII. The example of Jesus in doing good.——Acts x. 38.—*Who went about doing good* 303

SERM. XIX. On the fifth of November 1678. Before the Honourable house of Commons.——Luke ix. 55. 56. *But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them* 320

SERM. XX. Of love and charity.——John xiii. 34. 35. *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another* 336

SERM. XXI. Of the trial of the spirits.——1 John iv. 1. *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world* 352

SERMON I.

The wiſdom of being religious.

JOB xxviii. 28.

And unto man he ſaid, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom; and to depart from evil, is underſtanding.

IN this chapter Job diſcourſeth of the ſecrets of nature, and the unſearchable perfections of the works of God. And the reſult of his diſcourſe is this: That a perfect knowledge of nature is no where to be found but in the author of it; no leſs wiſdom and underſtanding than that which made the world, and contrived this vaſt and regular frame of nature, can thoroughly underſtand the philoſophy of it, and comprehend ſo vaſt a deſign. But yet there is a knowledge which is very proper to man, and lies level to human underſtanding; and that is, the knowledge of our creator, and of the duty we owe to him; the wiſdom of pleaſing God, by doing what he commands, and avoiding what he forbids. This knowledge and wiſdom may be attained by man, and is ſufficient to make him happy: *And unto man he ſaid, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom; and to depart from evil, is underſtanding.*

Theſe words conſiſt of two propoſitions, which are not diſtinct in ſenſe, but one and the ſame thing variouſly expreſſed; for *wiſdom* and *underſtanding* are ſynonymous words here: and though ſometimes they have different notions, yet in the poetical books of ſcripture they are moſt frequently uſed as words equivalent; and do both of them indifferently ſignify either a ſpeculative knowledge of things, or a practical ſkill about them, according to the exigency of the matter or thing ſpoken of. And ſo likewiſe *the fear of the Lord*, and *departure from evil*, are phraſes of a very near ſenſe, and like importance: and therefore we find them ſeveral times put together in ſcripture: Prov. iii. 7. *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil.*

Chap. xvi. 6. *By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* So that they differ only as cauſe and effect; which, by a metonymy uſual in all ſorts of authors, are frequently put one for another.

Now, *to fear the Lord*, and *to depart from evil*, are phraſes which the ſcripture uſeth in a very great latitude, to expreſs to us the ſum of religion, and the whole of our duty. And becauſe the large uſage of theſe phraſes is to be the foundation of my following diſcourſe, I ſhall, for the farther clearing of this matter, endeavour to ſhew theſe two things.

1. That it is very uſual in the language of ſcripture to expreſs the whole of religion by theſe and ſuch like phraſes.

2. The particular fitneſs of theſe two phraſes to deſcribe religion.

I. It is very uſual in the language of ſcripture to expreſs the whole of religion by ſome eminent principle or part of religion.

The great principles of religion are, knowledge, faith, remembrance, love, and fear; by all which the ſcripture uſeth to expreſs the whole duty of man.

In the Old Teſtament, by *the knowledge*, *remembrance*, and *fear*, *of God*. Religion is called *the knowledge of the Holy*, Prov. xxx. 3. And wicked men are deſcribed to be ſuch as *know not God*, Jer. x. 25. So likewiſe, by *the fear of the Lord*, frequently in this book of Job, and in the Pſalms and Proverbs. And *then they that feared the Lord, ſpake often one to another*, Mal. iii. 16. And the fear of God is expreſsly ſaid to be the ſum of religion: *Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man*, Eccl. xii. 13. And, on the contrary, the wicked are deſcribed to be ſuch as *have not the fear of God before their eyes*, Pſal. xxxvi. 1. And ſo likewiſe by *the remembrance of God: Remember thy creator in the days of thy youth*, Eccl. xii. 1.; that is, enter upon a religious courſe betimes. And, on the contrary, the character of the wicked is, that they forget God: *The wicked ſhall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*, Pſal. ix. 17. In the New Teſtament, religion is uſually expreſſed by *faith in God* and *Chriſt*, and *the love of them*. Hence it is, that true Chriſtians are

ſo

so frequently called *believers*, and wicked and ungodly men *unbelievers*; and that good men are described to be such as love God: *All things work together for good to them that love God*, Rom. viii. 28.; and *such as love the Lord Jesus Christ*, Eph. vi. 24. Now, the reason why these are put for the whole of religion, is, because the belief, and knowledge, and remembrance, and love, and fear of God, are such powerful principles, and have so great an influence upon men to make them religious, that where any one of these really is, all the rest, together with the true and genuine effects of them, are supposed to be.

And so likewise the sum of all religion is often expressed by some eminent part of it; which will explain the second phrase here in the text, *departing from evil*. The worship of God is an eminent part of religion; and prayer, which is often in scripture expressed by *seeking God*, and *calling upon his name*, is a chief part of religious worship. Hence religion is described by *seeking God: He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, Heb. xi. 6.; and by *calling upon his name: Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved*, Acts ii. 21.; and so by *coming to God*, and by *departing from evil*. In this fallen state of man, religion begins with repentance and conversion; the two opposite terms of which are, God, and sin. Hence it is that religion is described sometimes by *coming to God: He that cometh to God, must believe that he is*, Heb. xi. 6.; that is, no man can be religious, unless he believe there is a God: sometimes by *departing from sin: And he that departeth from evil, maketh himself a prey*, Is. lix. 15.; that is, such was the bad state of those times of which the Prophet there complains, that no man could be religious but he was in danger of being persecuted.

II. For the fitness of these two phrases to describe religion.

1. For the first, *the fear of the Lord*: the fitness of this phrase will appear, if we consider how great an influence the fear of God hath upon men to make them religious. Fear is a passion that is most deeply rooted in our natures, and flows immediately from that principle of self-preservation which God hath planted in every man.

Every one deſires his own preſervation and happineſs, and therefore hath a natural dread and horror of every thing that can deſtroy his being, or endanger his happineſs. And the greateſt danger is from the greateſt power; and that is omnipotency. So that the fear of God is an inward acknowledgment of a holy and juſt being, which is armed with an almighty and irreſiſtible power; God having hid in every man's conſcience a ſecret awe and dread of his infinite power and eternal juſtice. Now, fear being ſo intimate to our natures, it is the ſtrongeſt bond of laws, and the great ſecurity of our duty.

There are two bridles or reſtraints which God hath put upon human nature; ſhame and fear. Shame is the weaker, and hath place only in thoſe in whom there are ſome remainders of virtue. Fear is the ſtronger; and works upon all who love themſelves, and deſire their own preſervation. Therefore, in this degenerate ſtate of mankind, fear is that paſſion which hath the greateſt power over us, and by which God and his laws take the ſureſt hold of us. Our deſire, and love, and hope, are not ſo apt to be wrought upon by the repreſentation of virtue, and the promiſes of reward and happineſs, as our fear is from the apprehenſions of divine diſpleaſure. For though we have loſt in a great meaſure the guſt and reliſh of true happineſs, yet we ſtill retain a quick ſenſe of pain and miſery. So that fear relies upon a natural love of ourſelves, and is complicated with a neceſſary deſire of our own preſervation. And therefore religion uſually makes its firſt entrance into us by this paſſion. Hence perhaps it is that Solomon more than once calls *the fear of the Lord the beginning of wiſdom.*

2. As for the ſecond phraſe, *departing from evil;* the fitneſs of it to expreſs the whole duty of man will appear, if we conſider the neceſſary connexion that is between the negative and the poſitive part of our duty. He that is careful to avoid all ſin, will ſincerely endeavour to perform his duty. For the ſoul of man is an active principle, and will be employed one way or other; it will be doing ſomething. If a man abſtain from evil, he will do good. Now, there being ſuch a ſtrait connexion between theſe, the whole of our duty may be expreſſed by either of them; but moſt fitly by *departing from evil*, becauſe

becauſe that is the firſt part of our duty. Religion begins in the forſaking of ſin.

Virtus eſt vitium fugere, & ſapientia prima
Stultitiâ caruiſſe ———

"Virtue begins in the forſaking of vice; and the firſt "part of wiſdom is, not to be a fool." And therefore the ſcripture, which mentions theſe parts of our duty, doth conſtantly put departing from evil firſt: *Depart from evil, and do good*, Pſal. xxxiv. 14. & xxxvii. 27.; *Ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well*, Iſ. i. 16. 17.; *Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord*, chap. lv. 7. We are firſt to *put off the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful luſts*; and then *to be renewed in the ſpirit of our minds, and to put on the new man*; &c. Eph. iv. 22. 23. 24. *Let him eſchew evil, and do good*, 1 Pet. iii. 11. To all which I may add this farther conſideration, that the law of God contained in the ten commandments conſiſting moſtly of prohibitions, (Thou ſhalt not do ſuch or ſuch a thing), our obſervance of it is moſt fitly expreſſed by *departing from evil*; which yet includes obedience likewiſe to the poſitive precepts implied in thoſe prohibitions.

Having thus explained the words, I come now to conſider the propoſition contained in them; which is this:

That religion is the beſt knowledge and wiſdom.

This I ſhall endeavour to make good theſe three ways.

1. By a direct proof of it.

2. By ſhewing, on the contrary, the folly and ignorance of irreligion and wickedneſs.

3. By vindicating religion from thoſe common imputations which ſeem to charge it with ignorance or imprudence.

Firſt, I begin with the direct proof of this. And, becauſe religion comprehends two things, the knowledge of the principles of it, and a ſuitable life and practice; (the firſt of which, being ſpeculative, may more properly be called *knowledge*; and the latter, becauſe it is practical, may be called *wiſdom*, or *prudence*); therefore I ſhall endeavour diſtinctly to prove theſe two things.

1. That religion is the beſt knowledge.

2. That it is the trueſt wiſdom.

I. That it is the beſt knowledge.

The knowledge of religion commends itſelf to us upon theſe two accounts.

1. It is the knowledge of thoſe things which are in themſelves moſt excellent.

2. Of thoſe things which are moſt uſeful and neceſſary for us to know.

1ſt, It is the beſt knowledge, becauſe it is the knowledge of thoſe things which are in themſelves moſt excellent, and deſirable to be known; and thoſe are, God, and our duty. God is the ſum and comprehenſion of all perfection. It is delightful to know the creatures, becauſe there are particular excellencies ſcattered and diſperſed among them, which are ſome ſhadows of the divine perfections. But in God all perfections in their higheſt degree and exaltation meet together and are united. How much more delightful then muſt it needs be to fix our minds upon ſuch an object, in which there is nothing but beauty and brightneſs; what is amiable, and what is excellent; what will raviſh our affections and raiſe our wonder, pleaſe us and aſtoniſh us at once? And that the finite meaſure and capacity of our underſtandings is not able to take in and comprehend the infinite perfections of God, this indeed ſhews the excellency of the object, but doth not altogether take away the delightfulneſs of the knowledge. For as it is pleaſant to the eye to have an endleſs proſpect, ſo is it ſome pleaſure to a finite underſtanding to view unlimited excellencies which have no ſhore or bounds, though it cannot comprehend them. There is a pleaſure in admiration: and this is that which properly cauſeth admiration, when we diſcover a great deal in an object which we underſtand to be excellent, and yet we ſee we know not how much more beyond that, which our underſtandings cannot fully reach and comprehend.

And as the knowledge of God in his nature and perfections is excellent and deſirable, ſo likewiſe to know him in thoſe glorious manifeſtations of himſelf in the works of creation and providence; and above all, in that ſtupendious work of the redemption of the world by Jeſus Chriſt, which was ſuch a myſtery, and ſo excellent a piece of knowledge, that *the angels* are ſaid to *deſire to pry into it*, 1 Pet. i. 12.

And

And as the knowledge of God is excellent, so likewise of our duty; which is nothing else but virtue, and goodness, and holiness, which are the image of God; a conformity to the nature and will of God, and an imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections, so far as we are capable: for to know our duty, is to know what it is to be like God in goodness, and pity, and patience, and clemency; in pardoning injuries, and passing by provocations; in justice and righteousness, in truth and faithfulness, and in a hatred and detestation of the contrary of these. In a word, it is to know what is the good and acceptable will of God, what it is that he loves and delights in, and is pleased withal, and would have us to do in order to our perfection and our happiness. It is deservedly accounted a piece of excellent knowledge, to know the laws of the land and the customs of the country we live in, and the will of the prince we live under: how much more, to know the statutes of heaven, and the laws of eternity, those immutable and eternal rules of justice and righteousness; to know the will and pleasure of the great monarch and universal king of the world, and the customs of that country where we must live for ever? This made David to admire the law of God at that strange rate, and to advance the knowledge of it above all other knowledge: *I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy commandment is exceeding broad,* Psal. cxix. 96.

2*dly*, It is the knowledge of those things which are most useful and necessary for us to know. The goodness of every thing is measured by its end and use; and that is the best thing which serves the best end and purpose; and the more necessary any thing is to such an end, the better it is: so that the best knowledge is that which is of greatest use and necessity to us in order to our great end; which is, eternal happiness, and the salvation of our souls. Curious speculations, and the contemplation of things that are impertinent to us, and do not concern us, nor serve to promote our happiness, are but a more specious and ingenious sort of idleness, a more pardonable and creditable kind of ignorance. That man that doth not know those things which are of use and necessity for him to know, is but an ignorant man, whatever he may know besides. Now, the knowledge of

of God, and of Chriſt, and of our duty, is of the greateſt uſefulneſs and neceſſity to us in order to our happineſs. It is of abſolute neceſſity that we ſhould know God and Chriſt, in order to our being happy: *This is life eternal,* (that is, the only way to it), *to know thee the only true God, and him whom thou haſt ſent, Jeſus Chriſt,* John xvii. 3. It is neceſſary alſo, in order to our happineſs, to know our duty; becauſe it is neceſſary for us to do it, and it is impoſſible to do it except we know it.

So that whatſoever other knowledge a man may be endued withal, he is but an ignorant perſon who doth not know God, the author of his being, the preſerver and protector of his life, his ſovereign and his judge, the giver of every good and perfect gift, his ſureſt refuge in trouble, his beſt friend or worſt enemy, the preſent ſupport of his life, his hopes in death, his future happineſs, and his portion for ever; who does not know his relation to God, the duty that he owes him, and the way to pleaſe him who can make him happy or miſerable for ever; who doth not know the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

If a man, by a vaſt and imperious mind, and *a heart large as the ſand upon the ſea-ſhore,* (as it is ſaid of Solomon), could command all the knowledge of nature and art, of words and things; could attain to a maſtery in all languages, and ſound the depths of all arts and ſciences; meaſure the earth and the heavens, and tell the ſtars, and declare their order and motions; could diſcourſe of the intereſts of all ſtates, the intrigues of all courts, the reaſon of all civil laws and conſtitutions, and give an account of the hiſtory of all ages; could ſpeak of trees, *from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyſſop that ſprings out of the wall; and of beaſts alſo, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fiſhes;* and yet ſhould, in the mean time, be deſtitute of the knowledge of God and Chriſt, and his duty: all this would be but an impertinent vanity, and a more glittering kind of ignorance; and ſuch a man (like the philoſopher, who, whilſt he was gazing upon the ſtars, fell into the ditch) would but *ſapienter deſcendere in infernum,* be undone with all this knowledge, and with a great deal of wiſdom go down to hell.

II. That

II. That to be religious is the trueſt wiſdom; and that likewiſe upon two accounts.

1. Becauſe it is to be wiſe for ourſelves.

2. It is to be wiſe as to our main intereſt and concernment.

1ſt, It is to be wiſe for ourſelves. There is an expreſſion, Job xxii. 2. *He that is wiſe, is profitable to himſelf;* and, Prov. ix. 12. *If thou be wiſe, thou ſhalt be wiſe for thyſelf:* intimating, that wiſdom regards a man's own intereſt and advantage; and that he is not a wiſe man that doth not take care of himſelf and his own concernments; according to that of old Ennius, *Nequicquam ſapere ſapientem, qui ſibi ipſi prodeſſe non quiret.* "That man hath but an empty title of wiſdom, and is "not really wiſe, who is not wiſe for himſelf." As ſelf-preſervation is the firſt principle of nature, ſo care of ourſelves and our own intereſt is the firſt part of wiſdom. He that is wiſe in the affairs and concernments of other men, but careleſs and negligent of his own, that man may be ſaid to be buſy, but he is not wiſe: he is employed indeed, but not ſo as a wiſe man ſhould be. Now, this is the wiſdom of religion, that it directs a man to a care of his own proper intereſt and concernment.

2dly, It is to be wiſe as to our main intereſt. Our chief end and higheſt intereſt is happineſs: and this is happineſs, to be freed from all, if it may, however from the greateſt evils; and to enjoy, if it may be, all good, however the chiefeſt. To be happy, is not only to be freed from the pains and diſeaſes of the body, but from anxiety and vexation of ſpirit; not only to enjoy the pleaſures of ſenſe, but peace of conſcience, and tranquillity of mind. To be happy, is not only to be ſo for a little while, but as long as may be; and, if it be poſſible, for ever. Now, religion deſigns our greateſt and longeſt happineſs; it aims at a freedom from the greateſt evils, and to bring us to the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of the greateſt good: for religion wiſely conſiders, that men have immortal ſpirits; which, as they are ſpirits, are capable of a pleaſure and happineſs diſtinct from that of our bodies and our ſenſes; and, becauſe they are immortal, are capable of an everlaſting happineſs. Now, our ſouls being the beſt part of ourſelves, and eternity being infinitely

finitely the moſt conſiderable duration, the greateſt wiſdom is, to ſecure the intereſt of our ſouls and of eternity, though it be with loſs, and to the prejudice of our temporal and inferior intereſts. Therefore religion directs us rather to ſecure inward peace than outward eaſe; to be more careful to avoid everlaſting and intolerable torment, than ſhort and light afflictions which are but for a moment; to court the favour of God more than the friendſhip of the world; and not ſo much *to fear them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, as him who, after he hath killed, can deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell.* In a word, our main intereſt is, to be as happy as we can, and as long as is poſſible; and if we be caſt into ſuch circumſtances, that we muſt be either in part, and for a time, or elſe wholly and always miſerable, the beſt wiſdom is, to chuſe the greateſt and moſt laſting happineſs, but the leaſt and ſhorteſt miſery. Upon this account religion prefers thoſe pleaſures which flow from the preſence of God for evermore, infinitely before the tranſitory pleaſures of this world; and is much more careful to avoid eternal miſery than preſent ſufferings. This is the wiſdom of religion, that, upon conſideration of the whole, and caſting up all things together, it does adviſe and lead us to our beſt intereſt.

Secondly, The ſecond way of confirmation ſhall be by endeavouring to ſhew the ignorance and folly of irreligion. Now, all that are irreligious are ſo upon one of theſe two accounts: either, firſt, Becauſe they do not believe the foundations and principles of religion, as the exiſtence of God, the immortality of the ſoul, and future rewards: or elſe, ſecondly, Becauſe, though they do in ſome ſort believe theſe things, yet they live contrary to this their belief; and of this kind are the far greateſt part of wicked men. The firſt ſort are guilty of that which we call *ſpeculative*; the other, of *practical* Atheiſm. I ſhall endeavour to ſhew the ignorance and folly of both theſe.

Firſt, *Speculative* Atheiſm is unreaſonable; and that upon theſe five accounts. 1. Becauſe it gives no tolerable account of the exiſtence of the world. 2. Nor does it give any reaſonable account of the univerſal conſent of mankind in this apprehenſion, that there is a God. 3. It

3. It requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. 4. The Atheiſt pretends to know that which no man can know. 5. Atheiſm contradicts itſelf.

I. Becauſe it gives no tolerable account of the exiſtence of the world. One of the greateſt difficulties that lies in the Atheiſt's way is, upon his own ſuppoſition, that there is no God, to give a likely account of the exiſtence of the world. We ſee this vaſt frame of the world, and an innumerable multitude of creatures in it; all which we who believe a God, attribute to him as the author of them. For a being ſuppoſed of infinite goodneſs, and wiſdom, and power, is a very likely cauſe of theſe things. What more likely to make this vaſt world, to ſtretch forth the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and to form theſe, and all things in them, of nothing, than infinite power? what more likely to communicate being, and ſo many degrees of happineſs, to ſo many ſeveral ſorts of creatures, than infinite goodneſs? what more likely to contrive this admirable frame of the univerſe, and all the creatures in it, each of them ſo perfect in their kind, and all of them ſo fitted to each other, and to the whole, than infinite counſel and wiſdom? This ſeems to be no unreaſonable account.

But let us ſee now what account the Atheiſt gives of theſe things. If there be no God, there are but theſe two ways imaginable for the world to be. Either it muſt be ſaid, that not only the matter, but alſo the frame of this world is eternal; and that, as to the main, things always were as they are, without any firſt cauſe of their being; which is the way of the Ariſtotelian Atheiſt, (thoſe I mean who proceed upon Ariſtotle's ſuppoſition of the eternity of the world, but yet deny it to be from God, which he expreſsly aſſerts): or elſe, the matter of the world being ſuppoſed to be eternal, and of itſelf, the original of this vaſt and beautiful frame muſt be aſcribed merely to chance, and the caſual concourſe of the parts of matter; which is the way of the Epicurean Atheiſt. But neither of theſe ways gives a tolerable account of the exiſtence of the world.

I ſhall *firſt* conſider the hypotheſis of thoſe whom, for diſtinction's ſake, I call the *Ariſtotelian* Atheiſts; which is this, That not only the matter, but alſo the frame of the world

world is eternal; and that, as to the main, it was always as it is, of itſelf; and that there hath been from all eternity a ſucceſſion of men and other creatures without any firſt cauſe of their being.

It ſeems to be very hard, and, if that would do any good, might be juſt matter of complaint, that we are fallen into ſo profane and ſceptical an age, which takes a pleaſure and a pride in unravelling almoſt all the received principles both of religion and reaſon: ſo that we are put many times to prove thoſe things which can hardly be made plainer than they are of themſelves. And ſuch almoſt are theſe principles, That God is, and, That all things were made by him; which, by reaſon of the bold cavils of perverſe and unreaſonable men, we are now-a-days put to defend.

That ſomething is of itſelf, is evident, becauſe we ſee things are. And the things that we ſee, muſt either have had ſome firſt cauſe of their being, or have been always, and of themſelves. One of theſe two is unavoidable.

So that the controverſy between us and this ſort of Atheiſts comes to this: Which is the more credible opinion, That the world was never made, nor had a beginning, but always was as it is; and that there hath been from all eternity a ſucceſſion of men and other creatures without any firſt cauſe of their being: or, That there was from all eternity ſuch a being as we conceive God to be, infinite in power, goodneſs, and wiſdom, which made us and all other things? The firſt of theſe opinions I ſhall ſhew to be altogether incredible; and the latter to have all the credibility and evidence of which a thing of that nature is capable, and ſuch evidence as is ſufficient to convince any impartial and conſiderate man.

Now, in comparing the probabilities of things, that we may know on which ſide the advantage lies, theſe two conſiderations are of great moment; What the arguments are on each ſide? and, What the difficulties? For if there be fair proofs on the one ſide, and none at all on the other; and if the moſt preſſing difficulties be on that ſide on which there are no proofs, this is ſufficient to render one opinion very credible, and the other altogether incredible.

Theſe

Theſe two things therefore I ſhall endeavour to make good in the matter that is now under our conſideration. 1. That there are fair proofs on our ſide, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence of proof on the other. And, 2. That the ſide on which there is no proof, is incumbered with the greateſt difficulties.

1ſt, That there are fair proofs on our ſide, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence of proof on the other.

This queſtion, Whether the world was created, and had a beginning, or not? is a queſtion concerning an ancient matter of fact, which can only be decided theſe two ways; by teſtimony, and by probabilities of reaſon. Teſtimony is the principal argument in a matter of this nature; and if fair probabilities of reaſon concur with it, this argument hath all the ſtrength it can have. Now, both theſe are clearly on the affirmative ſide of the queſtion, *viz.* That the world was created, and had a beginning.

1ſt, Teſtimony; of which there be two kinds, divine and human.

Divine teſtimony, as ſuch, is not proper to be uſed in this cauſe, conſidering the occaſion of the preſent debate: for that would be to beg the firſt and main queſtion now in controverſy; which is, Whether there be a God or not? which a teſtimony from God does ſuppoſe, and therefore ought not to be brought for the proof of it. It is true indeed, that thoſe effects of divine power, I mean miracles, which will prove a divine teſtimony to an infidel, will as well prove the being of a God to an Atheiſt. But when we diſpute againſt thoſe who deny a God, no teſtimony ought to be preſumed to be from God, but muſt be proved to be ſo. And whatever argument proves that, will alſo prove that there is a God.

Human teſtimonies are of two ſorts; univerſal tradition, and written hiſtory. Both theſe are plainly and beyond diſpute on our ſide.

1. There is an univerſal tradition concerning the beginning of the world, and that it was made by God. And for the evidence of this we have the concurring tradition of the moſt ancient nations, the Egyptians and Phe-

nicians *; and of the moſt barbarous, the Indians, who, as Strabo, *Geogr.* l. 15. tells us, "did in many things "agree with the Grecians, particularly in this, that the "world did begin, and ſhould have an end; and that "God, the maker and governor of it, is preſent in "all parts of it." And Acoſta tells us, that, at the firſt diſcovery of America, the inhabitants of Peru did worſhip one chief God, under the name or title of *The maker of the univerſe*. And yet theſe people had not had any commerce with the other known parts of the world, for God knows how many ages.

To which may be added, that the moſt ancient of the philoſophers, and thoſe that were the heads of the chief ſects of philoſophy, as Thales, Anaxagoras, and Pythagoras, did likewiſe conſent to this tradition. Particularly, concerning Thales, Tully, *De nat. Deorum l.* 1. tells us, that "he was the firſt of all the philoſophers "that inquired into theſe things; and he ſaid, that water "was the beginning of all things, and that God was that "mind (or intelligent principle) which faſhioned all "things out of water." So likewiſe Strabo, *Geogr. l.* 15. informs us, that the Brachmans, the chief ſect of philoſophers among the Indians, agreed with the Grecians in this, "That the world was made of water." Which agrees exactly with Moſes's account of the creation, *viz.* That *the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters:* which St Peter expreſſes thus, That *by the word of God the heavens and the earth* (for ſo the Hebrews call the world) *were of old* ἐξ ὕδατος συνεστῶσα, *conſtituted or made of water*, 2 Pet. iii. 5. not *ſtanding out of the water*, as our tranſlation renders it.

Nay, Ariſtotle himſelf, *Metaph. l.* 1. *c.* 3. who was the great aſſerter of the eternity of the world, gives this account why the gods were anciently repreſented by the Heathens as ſwearing by the lake Styx, becauſe water was ſuppoſed to be the principle of all things. And this, he tells us, was the moſt ancient opinion concerning the original of the world; and that the very oldeſt writers of theology, and thoſe who lived at the greateſt diſtance from his time, were of this mind. And, in the book *De mundo*, *c.* 6. it is freely acknowledged to have been

* Vide Grot. de verit. Chriſt. relig. l. 1.

been an ancient ſaying, and a general tradition among all men, That all things are of God, and were made by him. I will conclude this with that full teſtimony of Maximus Tyrius to this purpoſe: "However (ſays he, *diſſertat.* I.) men may differ in other things, yet they "all agree in this law or principle, That there is one "God, King and Father of all things, *&c.* This the "Greeks ſay, this the barbarians; this thoſe that live "upon the continent, and thoſe that dwell by the ſea; "the wiſe and the unwiſe."

2. We have likewiſe a moſt ancient and credible hiſtory of the beginning of the world; I mean, the hiſtory of Moſes; with which no book in the world in point of antiquity can contend. I ſhall not now go about to ſtrengthen my argument, by pleading the divine authority of this book; for which yet I could offer good evidence, if that were proper to the matter in hand. It is ſufficient to my preſent purpoſe, that Moſes have the ordinary credit of an hiſtorian given him; which none in reaſon can deny him, he being cited by the moſt ancient of the Heathen hiſtorians, and the antiquity of his writings never queſtioned by any of them, as Joſephus, *l.* 1. *cont. Appion.* aſſures us.

Now, this hiſtory of Moſes gives us a particular account of the beginning of the world, and of the creation of it by God. Which aſſertion of his is agreeable to the moſt ancient writers among the Heathen, whether poets or hiſtorians. And ſeveral of the main parts of Moſes's hiſtory, as concerning the flood, and the firſt fathers of the ſeveral nations of the world, (of which he gives a particular account Gen. x.) do very well accord with the moſt ancient accounts of profane hiſtory. And I do not know, whether any thing ought more to recommend the writings of Moſes to a human belief, than the eaſy and credible account which he gives of the original of the world, and of the firſt peopling of it.

As to the account of ancient times, both the Egyptian and Chaldean accounts, which are pretended by ſome to be ſo vaſtly different from that of the ſcriptures, may for all that be, near the matter, eaſily reconciled with it*; if we do but admit what Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch,

* *Vide* Dr. Stillingfleet's *Orig. ſacr.* where this is fully made out.

very credible perſons, and diligent ſearchers into ancient books, do moſt expreſsly aſſure us, *viz.* that both thoſe nations did anciently reckon months for years. And the account of the Chineſes is not hard to be reconciled with that of the Septuagint. Now, in ſo nice and obſcure a matter as the account of ancient times is, it ought to ſatisfy any fair and reaſonable inquirer, if they can be brought any whit near one another.

So that univerſal tradition, and the moſt ancient hiſtory in the world, are clearly on our ſide. And if they be, one can hardly wiſh a more convincing argument. For, if the world, and conſequently mankind, had a beginning, there is all the reaſon in the world to expect theſe two things. 1. That there ſhould be an univerſal tradition concerning this matter; becauſe it was the moſt memorable thing that could be tranſmitted to poſterity. And this was eaſy to be done, if mankind ſprang from one common root and original, from whence this tradition would naturally be univerſally diffuſed. 2. It may with the ſame reaſon be expected, that ſo remarkable a thing ſhould be recorded in the moſt ancient hiſtory. Now, both theſe have accordingly happened. But then, on the other hand, if the world was eternal, and had no beginning, there could be no real ground for ſuch a tradition or hiſtory. And if ſuch a tradition were at any time endeavoured to be ſet on foot, it is not eaſy to imagine how it ſhould at firſt gain entertainment; but much more difficult to conceive, how ever it ſhould come to be univerſally propagated. For, upon the ſuppoſition of thoſe who hold the eternity of the world, the world was always peopled; and if ſo, there could be no common head or ſpring from whence ſuch a tradition would naturally derive itſelf into all parts of the world. So that unleſs all the world was ſometime of one language, and under one government, (which it never was that we know of ſince it was peopled), no endeavour and induſtry could make ſuch a tradition common.

If it be ſaid, That this tradition began after ſome univerſal deluge, out of which poſſibly but one family might eſcape, and that poſſibly too of barbarous people; from whom any fond and groundleſs conceit might ſpring, and afterwards ſpread itſelf as mankind increaſed: This

I shall have occasion to consider in a more proper place. In the mean time I have shewn, even from the acknowledgment of Aristotle himself, that there was anciently such a tradition concerning the beginning of the world. Nay, if we may believe him, he himself was the very first asserter of the eternity of the world: for he says expressly, "That all the philosophers that were before him "did hold that the world was made," *De cælo, l.* 1. c. 10. Thus much for the first kind of proof this matter is capable of, namely, testimony.

2dly, The probabilities of reason do all likewise favour the beginning of the world: As,

1. The want of any history or tradition ancienter than what is consistent with the received opinion of the time of the world's beginning; nay the most ancient histories were written long after that time. This Lucretius, the famous Epicurean, urgeth as a strong presumption that the world had a beginning:

> *——Si nulla fuit genitalis origo*
> *Terrarum & cœli, semperque æterna fuere;*
> *Cur supra bellum Thebanum, & funera Trojæ,*
> *Non alias alii quoque res cecinere poetæ?*

i. e. "If the world had no beginning, how is it that the "Greek poets (the most ancient of their writers) mention nothing higher than the Theban war, and the "destruction of Troy?" Were there from all eternity no memorable actions done till about that time? or had mankind no way till of late to record them, and propagate the memory of them to posterity? It is much, if men were from eternity, that they should not find out the way of writing in all that long duration which had past before that time. Sure he was a fortunate man indeed, who, after men had been eternally so dull as not to find it out, had the luck at last to hit upon it.

But it may be, the famous actions of former times were always recorded, but that the memorials of them have been several times lost by universal deluges, which have now and then happened, and swept all away, except (it may be) two or three persons that have escaped, and begun the world again upon a new score. This is the only refuge that the Atheist hath to fly to, when he

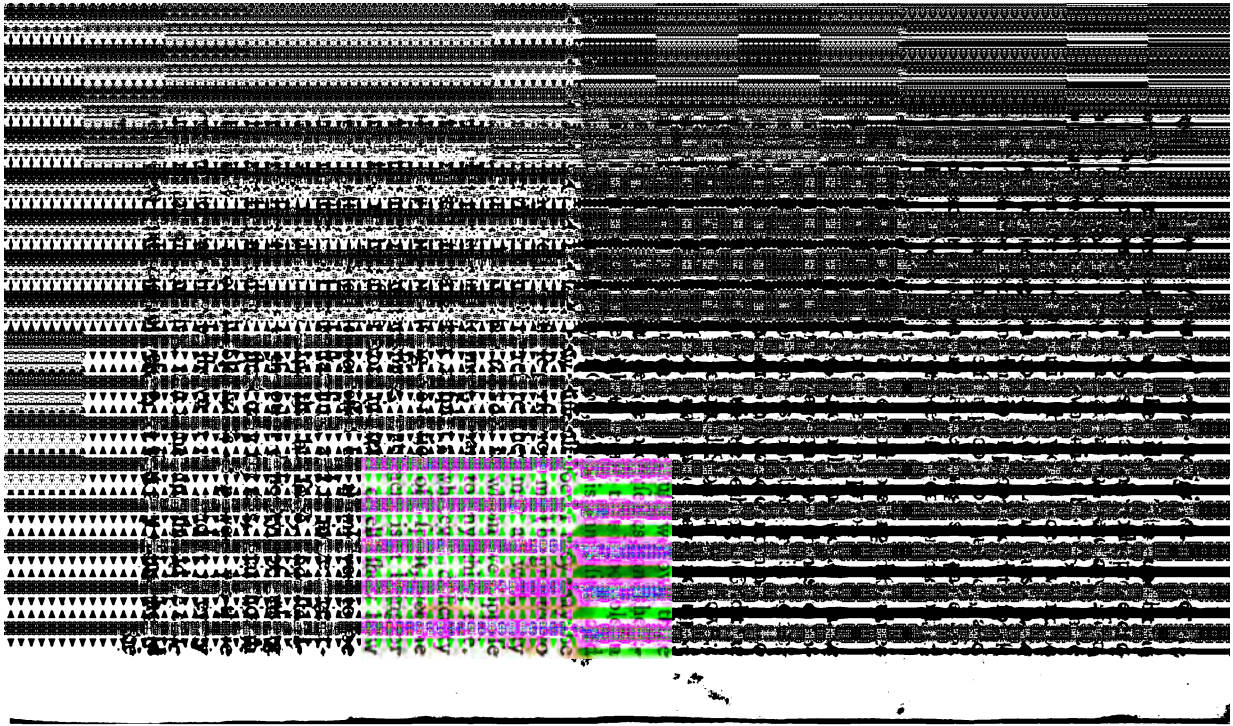
(and who would not think they should in an eternal duration?) it is not imaginable but that they should have been spread innumerable ages since. Nor can any man give a good reason how they should ever be lost, but by some such accident as an universal deluge; which has been spoken to already. But now, on the contrary, the beginnings of learning, and of the most useful arts in several nations, is very well known. And I add farther, that where-ever learning and civil arts have come, this tradition concerning the beginning of the world hath been most vigorous, and asserted with the greatest clearness and confidence.

3. The several parts of which the world consists, being (so far as, by those parts of it which we know, we can possibly judge of the rest) in their nature corruptible, it is more than probable, that in an infinite duration this frame of things would long since have been dissolved; especially if, as the Atheist affirms, there be no superior being, no wise and intelligent principle, to repair and regulate it, and to prevent those innumerable disorders and calamitous accidents, which must in so long a space in all probability have happened to it. This Lucretius, *l.* 5. also urges as a convincing proof that the world was not eternal.

[redacted]*are etiam nativa necesse est confiteare*
Haec eadem; neque enim mortali corpore quae sunt,
De infinito jam tempore adhuc potuissent
Immensi validas aevi contemnere vires.

"It must necessarily (says he) be acknowledged, "that the world had a beginning; otherwise those "things which are in their own nature corruptible, "had never been able, from all eternity, to have held "out against those forcible and violent assaults which "in an infinite duration must have happened." Nay, this much Aristotle himself every where grants, that if the frame of the world be liable to dissolution, it must of necessity be acknowledged to have had a beginning.

These are some of the chief probabilities on our side; which, being taken together, and in their united force, have a great deal of conviction in them: especially if this be added, that there is no kind of positive proof so much



be of itself; which yet must be granted on both sides; and therefore this difficulty ought not to be objected by either.

But then on the other side there are these two great and real difficulties. *1st*, That men generally have always believed the contrary, *viz.* that the world had a beginning, and was made by God. Which is a strong evidence, that this account of the existence of the world is more natural, and of a more easy conception to human understanding. And indeed it is very natural to conceive, that every thing which is imperfect, (as the world and all the creatures in it must be acknowledged in many respects to be), had some cause which produced it, such as it is, and determined the bounds and limits of its perfection; but that which is of itself, and without a cause, may be any thing, and have any perfection which does not imply a contradiction. *2dly*, To assert mankind to have been of itself, and without a cause, hath this invincible objection against it, That we plainly see every man to be from another. So that mankind is asserted to have no cause of its being, and yet every particular man must be acknowledged to have a father; which is every whit as absurd in an infinite succession of men, as in any finite number of generations. It is more easy indeed to conceive, how a constant and permanent being, suppose matter, should always have been of itself; and then that that should be the foundation of infinite successive changes and alterations: but an infinite succession of the generations of men without any permanent foundation is utterly unimaginable. If it be said, that the earth was always, and in time did produce men, and that they ever since have produced one another; this is to run into one great absurdity of the Epicurean way, which shall be considered in its proper place.

And thus I have endeavoured, as plainly and briefly as the nature of the argument would admit, to prove, that the account which the scripture gives of the existence of the world, is most credible, and agreeable to the reason of mankind; and that this first account which the Atheist gives of it, is altogether incredible. And now I expect, after all this, the Atheist will complain, that all that hath been said does not amount to a strict demonstration

ſtration of the thing. It may be ſo. And if the Atheiſt would undertake to demonſtrate the contrary, there might be ſome reaſon for this complaint. In the mean time I deſire to know, whether, when both ſides are agreed that this world is, and that it muſt either have its original from God, or have been always of itſelf; and if it have been made evident, that on one ſide there are fair proofs both from teſtimony and reaſon, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of, and no pretence of proof on the other; and that the difficulties are moſt preſſing on that ſide which is deſtitute of proof: I ſay, if this have been made evident, I deſire to know whether this be not upon the matter as ſatisfactory to a wiſe man as a demonſtration? For in this caſe there can be no doubt on which ſide the clear advantage of evidence lies, and conſequently which way a prudent man ought to determine his aſſent.

I come now, in the *ſecond* place, to conſider the other account, which another ſort of Atheiſts, thoſe whom I call the *Epicureans*, do give of the exiſtence of the world. And it is this. They ſuppoſe the matter of which the world is conſtituted to be eternal, and of itſelf, and then an infinite empty ſpace for the infinite little parts of this matter (which they call *atoms*) to move and play in; and that theſe being always in motion, did, after infinite trials and encounters, without any counſel or deſign, and without the diſpoſal and contrivance of any wiſe and intelligent being, at laſt, by a lucky caſualty, entangle and ſettle themſelves in this beautiful and regular frame of the world which we now ſee; and that the earth, being at firſt in its full vigour and fruitfulneſs, did then bring forth men, and all other ſorts of living creatures, as it does plants now.

This is in ſhort the Epicurean account of the original of the world; which, as abſurd as it is, Lucretius, l. 5. hath very elegantly expreſſed in theſe verſes.

Sed quibus ille modis conjectus materiai,
Fundârit cælum, ac terram, pontique profundi,
Solisque & lunæ curſus, ex ordine ponat.
Nam certè neque conſilio primordia rerum,
Ordine ſe quæque, atque ſagaci mente locârunt,

Nec

Nec quos quæque darent motus pepigere profecto:
Sed quia multa modis multis primordia rerum
Ex infinito jam tempore percita plagis,
Ponderibusque suis consuerunt concita ferri,
Omnimodisque coire, atque omnia pertentare,
Quæcunque inter se possent congressa creare:
Propterea fit, uti magnum vulgata per ævum
Omnigenos cœtus, & motus experiundo,
Tandem ea conveniant, quæ ut convenere, repente
Magnarum rerum fiunt exordia sæpe,
Terrai, maris, & cœli, generisque animantum.

Thus he like a good poet, but a very bad maker and contriver of the world. For I appeal to any man of reason, whether any thing can be more unreasonable, than obstinately to impute an effect to chance which carries in the very face of it all the arguments and characters of a wise design and contrivance? Was ever any considerable work, in which there was required a great variety of parts, and a regular and orderly disposition of those parts, done by chance? Will chance fit means to ends, and that in ten thousand instances, and not fail in any one? How often might a man, after he had jumbled a set of letters in a bag, fling them out upon the ground before they would fall into an exact poem, yea or so much as make a good discourse in prose? and may not a little book be as easily made by chance, as this great volume of the world? How long might a man be in sprinkling colours upon canvas with a careless hand, before they would happen to make the exact picture of a man? and is a man easier made by chance than his picture? How long might twenty thousand blind men, which should be sent out from the several remote parts of England, wander up and down, before they would all meet upon Salisbury-plains, and fall into rank and file in the exact order of an army? And yet this is much more easy to be imagined, than how the innumerable blind parts of matter should rendezvous themselves into a world. A man that sees Henry VII.'s chapel at Westminster, might with as good reason maintain, (yea with much better, considering the vast difference between that little structure and the huge fabrick of the world), that it was never

never contrived nor built by any man, but that the ſtones did by chance grow into thoſe curious figures into which they ſeem to have been cut and graven; and that, *upon a time*, (as tales uſually begin), the materials of that building, the ſtone, mortar, timber, iron, lead, and glaſs, happily met together, and very fortunately ranged themſelves into that delicate order in which we ſee them now ſo cloſe compacted, that it muſt be a very great chance that parts them again. What would the world think of a man, that ſhould advance ſuch an opinion as this, and write a book for it? If they would do him right, they ought to look upon him as mad: but yet with a little more reaſon than any man can have to ſay, that the world was made by chance, or that the firſt men grew up out of the earth as plants do now. For can any thing be more ridiculous and againſt all reaſon, than to aſcribe the production of men to the firſt fruitfulneſs of the earth, without ſo much as one inſtance and experiment in any age or hiſtory to countenance ſo monſtrous a ſuppoſition? The thing is at firſt ſight ſo groſs and palpable, that no diſcourſe about it can make it more apparent. And yet theſe ſhameful beggars of principles, who give this precarious account of the original of things, aſſume to themſelves to be the men of reaſon, the great wits of the world, the only cautious and wary perſons that hate to be impoſed upon; that muſt have convincing evidence for every thing, and can admit of nothing without a clear demonſtration for it.

II. Speculative Atheiſm is unreaſonable, becauſe it gives no reaſonable account of the univerſal conſent of mankind in this apprehenſion, That there is a God. That men do generally believe a God, and have done in all ages, the preſent experience of the world, and the records of former times, do abundantly teſtify. Now, how comes this perſuaſion to have gained ſo univerſal a poſſeſſion of the mind of man, and to have found ſuch general entertainment in all nations, even thoſe that are moſt barbarous? If there be no ſuch thing as God in the world, how comes it to paſs that this object doth continually encounter our underſtandings? whence is it that we are ſo perpetually haunted with the apparition of a Deity, and followed with it where-ever we go? If

it

it be not natural to the mind of man, but proceeds from ſome accidental diſtemper of our underſtandings, how comes it to be ſo univerſal, that no differences of age, or temper, or education, can wear it out, and ſet any conſiderable number of men free from it? Into what can we reſolve this ſtrong inclination of mankind to this error and miſtake? How come all nations to be thus ſeduced? It is altogether unimaginable, but that the reaſon of ſo univerſal a conſent in all places and ages of the world, and among all differences of perſons, ſhould be one and conſtant. But no one and conſtant reaſon of this can be given, but from the nature of man's mind and underſtanding, which hath this notion of a Deity born with it, and ſtamped upon it; or, which is all one, is of ſuch a frame, that, in the free uſe and exerciſe of itſelf, it will find out God. And what more reaſonable than to think, that if we be God's workmanſhip, he ſhould ſet this mark of himſelf upon all reaſonable creatures, that they may know to whom they belong, and may acknowledge the author of their beings? This ſeems to be a credible and ſatisfactory account of ſo univerſal a conſent in this matter. But now what doth the Atheiſt reſolve this into? He is not at one with himſelf what account to give of it: nor can it be expected he ſhould; for he that will overlook the true reaſon of a thing, which uſually is but one, may eaſily find many falſe ones, error being infinite. But there are three which he principally relies upon; fear, tradition, and policy of ſtate. I ſhall briefly conſider theſe.

1ſt, He would make us believe, that this apprehenſion of a God doth ſpring from an infinite jealouſy in the mind of man, and an endleſs fear of the worſt that may happen; according to that divine ſaying of the poet, which he can never ſufficiently admire,

Primum in orbe deos fecit timor,——

"Fear firſt made gods." So that it is granted on both ſides that the fear of a Deity doth univerſally poſſeſs the minds of men. Now, the queſtion is, Whether it be more likely, that the exiſtence of a God ſhould be the cauſe of this fear, or that this fear ſhould be the cauſe why men imagine there is a God? If there be a God who hath im-

preſſed this image of himſelf upon the mind of man, there is great reaſon why all men ſhould ſtand in awe of him. But if there be no God, it is not eaſy to conceive how fear ſhould create an univerſal confidence and aſſurance in men that there is one. For, whence ſhould this fear come? It muſt be either from without, from the ſuggeſtion of others, who firſt tell us there is ſuch a being, and then our fear believes it; or elſe it muſt ariſe from within, from the nature of man, which is apt to fancy dreadful and terrible things. If from the ſuggeſtion of others who tell us ſo, the queſtion returns, Who told them ſo? and will never be ſatisfied, till the firſt author of this report be found out. So that this account of fear reſolves itſelf into tradition; which ſhall be ſpoken to in its proper place. But if it be ſaid, that this fear ariſeth from within, from the nature of man, which is apt to imagine dreadful things, this likewiſe is liable to inexplicable difficulties. For, *firſt*, The proper object of fear, is ſomething that is dreadful; that is, ſomething that threatens men with harm or danger; and that in God muſt either be power or juſtice: and ſuch an object as this fear indeed may create. But goodneſs and mercy are eſſential to the notion of a God, as well as power and juſtice. Now, how ſhould fear put men upon fancying a being that is infinitely good and merciful? No man hath reaſon to be afraid of ſuch a being, as ſuch. So that the Atheiſt muſt join another cauſe to fear, *viz.* hope, to enable men to create this imagination of a God. And what would the product of theſe two contrary paſſions be? the imagination of a being which we ſhould fear would do us as much harm, as we could hope it would do us good? which would be *quid pro quo*, and which our reaſon would oblige us to lay aſide ſo ſoon as we have fancied it, becauſe it would ſignify juſt nothing. But, *ſecondly*, Suppoſe fear alone could do it, how comes the mind of man to be ſubject to ſuch groundleſs and unreaſonable fears? The Ariſtotelian Atheiſt will ſay, it always was ſo. But this is to affirm, and not to give any account of a thing. The Epicurean Atheiſt, if he will ſpeak conſonantly to himſelf, muſt ſay, that there happened, in the original conſtitution of the firſt men, ſuch a contexture of atoms, as doth naturally diſpoſe men

to

to these panick fears; unless he will say, that the first men, when they grew out of the earth, and afterwards broke loose from their root, finding themselves weak, and naked, and unarmed, and meeting with several fierce creatures stronger than themselves, they were put in such a fright, as did a little distemper their understandings, and let loose their imaginations to endless suspicions and unbounded jealousies, which did at last settle in the conceit of an invisible being, infinitely powerful, and able to do them harm; and being fully possessed with this apprehension, nothing being more ordinary than for crazed persons to believe their own fancies, they became religious; and afterwards when mankind began to be propagated in the way of generation, then religion obliged them to instil these principles into their children in their tender years, that so they might make the greater impression upon them; and this course having been continued ever since, the notion of a God hath been kept up in the world. This is very suitable to Epicurus's hypothesis of the original of men; but if any man think fit to say thus, I cannot think it fit to confute him. *Thirdly*, Whether men were from all eternity such timorous and fanciful creatures, or happened to be made so in the first constitution of things, it seems however that this fear of a Deity hath a foundation in nature. And if it be natural, ought we not rather to conclude, that there is some ground and reason for these fears, and that Nature hath not planted them in us to no purpose, than that they are vain and groundless. There is no principle that Aristotle, the great asserter of the eternity of the world, doth more frequently inculcate than this, That Nature doth nothing in vain: and the Atheist himself is forced to acknowledge, and so every man must who attentively considers the frame of the world, that although things were made by chance, yet they have happened as well as if the greatest wisdom had the ordering and contriving of them. And surely wisdom would never have planted such a vain principle as the fear of a Deity in the nature of man, if there had not been a God in the world.

2dly, If fear be not a sufficient account of this universal consent, the Atheist thinks it may very probably be

reſolved into univerſal tradition. But this likewiſe is liable to great exception. For, whence came this tradition? It muſt begin ſometime; it muſt have its original from ſome body; and it were well worth our knowing who that man was that firſt raiſed this ſpirit, which all the reaſon of mankind could never conjure down ſince. Where did he live, and when? In what country, and in what age of the world? *What was his name, or his ſon's name,* that we may know him? This the Atheiſt can give no punctual account of; only he imagines it not improbable, that ſome body long ago, (no body knows when), beyond the memory of all ages, did ſtart ſuch a notion in the world; and that it hath paſſed for current ever ſince. But if this tradition be granted ſo very ancient, as to have been before all books, and to be elder than any hiſtory, it may, for any thing any body can tell, have been from the beginning: and then it is much more likely to be a notion which was bred in the mind of man, and born with him, than a tradition tranſmitted from hand to hand through all generations; eſpecially if we conſider how many rude and barbarous nations there are in the world, which conſent in the opinion of a God, and yet have ſcarce any certain tradition of any thing that was done among them but two or three ages before.

3*dly*, But if neither of theſe be ſatisfactory, he hath one way more; which although it ſignify little to men of ſober and ſevere reaſon, yet it very unhappily hits the jealous and ſuſpicious humour of the generality of men, who, from the experience they have had of themſelves and others, are very apt to ſuſpect that every body, but eſpecially their ſuperiors and governors, have a deſign to impoſe upon them for their own ends. In ſhort, it is this: That this noiſe about a God is a mere ſtate-engine, and a politick device, invented at firſt by ſome great prince, or miniſter of ſtate, to keep people in awe and order. And if ſo, from hence (ſaith the Atheiſt) we may eaſily apprehend, how from ſuch an original it might be generally propagated, and become univerſally current, having the ſtamp of publick authority upon it: beſides, that people have always been found eaſy to comply with the inclinations of their prince. And from hence likewiſe

wise we may see the reason why this notion hath continued so long. For being found by experience to be so excellent an instrument of government, we may be sure it would always be cherished and kept up.

And now he triumphs, and thinks the business is very clear. Thus it was, some time or other, (most probably towards the beginning of the world, if it had a beginning, when all mankind was under one universal monarch), some great Nebuchadnezzar set up this image of a Deity, and commanded *all people and nations to fall down and worship it.* And this being found a successful device to awe people into obedience to government, it hath been continued to this day, and is like to last to the end of the world. To this fine conjecture I have these four things to say.

1. That all this is mere conjecture and supposition: he cannot bring the least shadow of proof or evidence for any one tittle of it.

2. This supposition grants the opinion of a God to conduce very much to the support of government and order in the world; and consequently to be very beneficial to mankind. So that the Atheist cannot but acknowledge, that it is great pity that it should not be true; and that it is the common interest of mankind, if there were but probable arguments for it, not to admit of any slight reasons against it; and to punish all those who would seduce men to Atheism, as the great disturbers of the world, and pests of human society.

3. This supposition can have nothing of certainty in it, unless this be true, that whoever makes a politick advantage of other men's principles, ought to be presumed to contrive those principles into them: whereas it is much more common, because more easy, for men to serve their own ends of those principles or opinions which they do not put into men, but find there. So that if the question of a God were to be decided by the probability of this conjecture, (which the Atheist applauds himself most in), it would be concluded in the affirmative; it being much more likely, since politicians reap the advantages of obedience and a more ready submission to government, from mens believing that there is a God, that they found the minds of men prepossessed to

to their hands with the notion of a God, than that they planted it there.

4. We have as much evidence of the contrary to this ſuppoſition, as ſuch a thing is capable of, *viz.* that it was not an *arcanum imperii*, a *ſecret of government*, to propagate the belief of a God among the people, when the governors themſelves knew it to be a cheat. For we find, in the hiſtories of all ages of which we have any records, (and of other ages we cannot poſſibly judge), that princes have not been more ſecure from troubles of conſcience, and the fears of religion, and the terrors of another world, (nay many of them more ſubject to theſe), than other men; as I could give many inſtances, and thoſe no mean ones. What made Caligula creep under the bed when it thundered? What made Tiberius, that great maſter of the crafts of government, complain ſo much of the grievous ſtings and laſhes he felt in his conſcience? What made Cardinal Wolſey, that great miniſter of ſtate in our own nation, to pour forth his ſoul in thoſe ſad words: "Had I been as diligent to pleaſe my "God, as I have been to pleaſe my King, he would not "have forſaken me now in my grey hairs?" What reaſon for ſuch actions and ſpeeches, if theſe great men had known that religion was but a cheat? But if they knew nothing of this ſecret, I think we may ſafely conclude, that the notion of a God did not come from the court; that it was not the invention of politicians, and a juggle of ſtate, to cozen the people into obedience.

And now, from all this that hath been ſaid, it ſeems to be very evident, that the general conſent of mankind in this apprehenſion, that there is a God, muſt in all reaſon be aſcribed to ſome more certain and univerſal cauſe than fear, or tradition, or ſtate-policy, *viz.* to this, that God himſelf hath wrought this image of himſelf upon the mind of man, and ſo woven it into the very frame of his being, that, like Phidias's picture in Minerva's ſhield, it can never totally be defaced, without the ruin of human nature.

I know but one objection that this diſcourſe is liable to; which is this, That the univerſal conſent of mankind in the apprehenſion of a God, is no more an argument that he really is, than the general agreement of ſo many nations,

nations, for ſo many ages, in the worſhip of many gods, is an argument that there are many.

To this I anſwer, 1. That the generality of the philoſophers, and wiſe men of all nations and ages, did diſſent from the multitude in theſe things. They believed but one ſupreme Deity, which, with reſpect to the various benefits men received from him, had ſeveral titles beſtowed upon him. And although they did ſervilely comply with the people in worſhipping God by ſenſible images and repreſentations; yet it appears by their writings, that they deſpiſed this way of worſhip, as ſuperſtitious, and unſuitable to the nature of God. So that polytheiſm and idolatry are far from being able to pretend to univerſal conſent, from their having had the vote of the multitude in moſt nations for ſeveral ages together; becauſe the opinion of the vulgar, ſeparated from the conſent and approbation of the wiſe, ſignifies no more than a great many cyphers would do without figures.

2. The groſs ignorance and miſtakes of the Heathen about God and his worſhip, are a good argument that there is a God; becauſe they ſhew that men ſunk into the moſt degenerate condition, into the greateſt blindneſs and darkneſs imaginable, do yet retain ſome ſenſe and awe of a Deity; that religion is a property of our natures; and that the notion of a Deity is intimate to our underſtandings, and ſticks cloſe to them, ſeeing men will rather have any God than none; and rather than want a Deity, they will worſhip any thing.

3. That there have been ſo many falſe gods deviſed, is rather an argument that there is a true one, than that there is none. There would be no counterfeits but for the ſake of ſomething that is real. For though all pretenders ſeem to be what they really are not, yet they pretend to be ſomething that really is: for to counterfeit, is to put on the likeneſs and appearance of ſome real excellency. There would be no braſs money, if there were not good and lawful money. Briſtol ſtones would not pretend to be diamonds, if there never had been any diamonds. Thoſe idols, in Henry VII.'s time, (as Sir Francis Bacon calls them), Lambert Symnel, and Perkin Warbeck, had never been ſet up, if there had not once been a real Plantagenet and Duke of York. So the idols

of

of the Heathen, though they be ſet up in affront to the true God; yet they rather prove that there is one, than the contrary.

III. Speculative Atheiſm is abſurd, becauſe it requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. Ariſtotle hath long ſince well obſerved, how unreaſonable it is to expect the ſame kind of proof and evidence for every thing, which we have for ſome things. Mathematical things, being of an abſtracted nature, are capable of the cleareſt and ſtricteſt demonſtration: but concluſions in natural philoſophy, are capable of proof by an induction of experiments; things of a moral nature, by moral arguments; and matters of fact, by credible teſtimony. And though none of theſe be capable of that ſtrict kind of demonſtration which mathematical matters are; yet have we an undoubted aſſurance of them, when they are proved by the beſt arguments that things of that kind will bear. No man can demonſtrate to me, unleſs we will call every argument that is fit to convince a wiſe man a demonſtration, that there is ſuch an iſland in America as Jamaica: yet, upon the teſtimony of credible perſons who have ſeen it, and authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as I am from doubting of the cleareſt mathematical demonſtration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm principle, by all thoſe who pretend to be certain of any thing at all, That when any thing, in any of theſe kinds, is proved by as good arguments as a thing of that kind is capable of, and we have as great aſſurance that it is, as we could poſſibly have ſuppoſing it were, we ought not in reaſon to make any doubt of the exiſtence of that thing.

Now to apply this to the preſent caſe: The being of a God is not mathematically demonſtrable; nor can it be expected it ſhould, becauſe only mathematical matters admit of this kind of evidence. Nor can it be proved immediately by ſenſe, becauſe God being ſuppoſed to be a pure ſpirit, cannot be the object of any corporeal ſenſe. But yet we have as great aſſurance that there is a God, as the nature of the thing to be proved is capable of, and as we could in reaſon expect to have, ſuppoſing that he were. For, let us ſuppoſe there were ſuch a being as an infinite

infinite ſpirit, clothed with all poſſible perfection; that is, as good, and wiſe, and powerful, *&c.* as can be imagined: what conceivable ways are there whereby we ſhould come to be aſſured that there is ſuch a being, but either by an internal impreſſion of the notion of a God upon our minds, or elſe by ſuch external and viſible effects, as our reaſon tells us muſt be attributed to ſome cauſe, and which we cannot, without great violence to our underſtandings, attribute to any other cauſe, but ſuch a being as we conceive God to be, that is, one that is infinitely good, and wiſe, and powerful? Now we have this double aſſurance that there is a God; and greater or other than this the thing is not capable of. If God ſhould aſſume a body, and preſent himſelf before our eyes, this might amaze us, but could not give us any rational aſſurance that there is an infinite ſpirit. If he ſhould work a miracle, this could not in reaſon convince an Atheiſt, more than the arguments he already hath for it. If the Atheiſt then were to *aſk a ſign in the heaven above, or in the earth beneath*, what could he deſire God to do for his conviction more than he hath already done? Could he deſire him to work a greater miracle than to make a world? Why, if God ſhould carry this perverſe man out of the limits of this world, and ſhew him *a new heaven and a new earth* ſpringing out of nothing, he might ſay, that innumerable parts of matter chanced juſt then to rally together, and to form themſelves into this new world; and that God did not make it. Thus you ſee, that we have all the rational aſſurance of a God that the thing is capable of; and that Atheiſm is abſurd and unreaſonable in requiring more.

IV. The Atheiſt is unreaſonable, becauſe he pretends to know that which no man can know, and to be certain of that which no body can be certain of; that is, that there is no God, and, which is conſequent upon this, as I ſhall ſhew afterwards, that it is not poſſible there ſhould be one. And the Atheiſt muſt pretend to know this certainly: for it were the greateſt folly in the world for a man to deny and deſpiſe a God, if he be not certain that he is not. Now, whoever pretends to be certain that there is no God, hath this great diſadvantage, he pretends to be certain of a pure negative. But

of

of negatives we have far the leaſt certainty; and they are uſually hardeſt, and many times impoſſible to be proved. Indeed ſuch negatives as only deny ſome particular mode or manner of a thing's exiſtence, a man may have a certainty of them; becauſe, when we ſee things to be, we may ſee what they are, and in what manner they do, or do not exiſt. For inſtance: We may be certain that man is not a creature that hath wings; becauſe this only concerns the manner of his exiſtence; and we ſeeing what he is, may certainly know that he is not ſo or ſo. But pure negatives, that is, ſuch as abſolutely deny the exiſtence of things, or the poſſibility of their exiſtence, can never be proved: for after all that can be ſaid againſt a thing, this will ſtill be true, that many things poſſibly are which we know not of, and that many more things may be than are; and, if ſo, after all our arguments againſt a thing, it will be uncertain whether it be or not. And this is univerſally true, unleſs the thing denied to be, do plainly imply a contradiction; from which I have already ſhewn the notion of a God to be free. Now, the Atheiſt pretends to be certain of a pure negative; that there is no ſuch being as God, and that it is not poſſible there ſhould be: but no man can reaſonably pretend to know thus much, but he muſt pretend to know all things that are or can be; which, if any man ſhould be ſo vain as to pretend to, yet it is to be hoped that no body would be ſo weak as to believe him.

V. Speculative Atheiſm is unreaſonable, becauſe it contradicts itſelf. There is this great contradiction in the denial of a God: He that denies a God, ſays that that is impoſſible which yet he muſt grant to be poſſible. He ſays it is impoſſible that there ſhould be ſuch a being as God, in ſaying that *de facto* there is no ſuch being. For, eternity being eſſential to the notion of a God, if there be not a God already, it is impoſſible now that there ſhould be one; becauſe ſuch a being as is ſuppoſed to be eſſentially eternal, and without beginning, cannot now begin to be. And yet he muſt grant it poſſible that there ſhould be ſuch a being; becauſe it is poſſible there ſhould be ſuch a being as hath all poſſible perfection: and ſuch a being as this is that which we call *God*, and is that very thing which the Atheiſt denies, and others affirm to be.

be. For he that denies a God, must deny such a being as all the world describe God to be; and this is the general notion which all men have of God, that he is a being as perfect as is possible; that is, endued with all such perfections as do not imply a contradiction; which none of those perfections which we attribute to God do, as I have already proved.

Secondly, Speculative Atheism, as it is unreasonable, so is it a most imprudent and uncomfortable opinion; and that upon these two accounts: 1*st*, Because it is against the present interest and happiness of mankind; 2*dly*, Because it is infinitely hazardous and unsafe in the issue.

1. It is against the present interest and happiness of mankind. If Atheism were the general opinion of the world, it would be infinitely prejudicial to the peace and happiness of human society, and would open a wide door to all manner of confusion and disorder. But this I shall not now insist upon, because I design a particular discourse of that by itself.

I shall at present content myself to shew how uncomfortable an opinion this would be to particular persons. For nothing can be more evident than that man is not sufficient of himself to his own happiness. He is liable to many evils and miseries which he can neither prevent nor redress. He is full of wants, which he cannot supply; and compassed about with infirmities, which he cannot remove; and obnoxious to dangers, which he can never sufficiently provide against. Consider man without the protection and conduct of a superior being, and he is secure of nothing that he enjoys in this world, and uncertain of every thing that he hopes for. He is apt to grieve for what he cannot help, and eagerly to desire what he is never likely to obtain. *Man walketh in a vain shew, and disquieteth himself in vain.* He courts happiness in a thousand shapes, and the faster he pursues it, the faster it flies from him. His hopes and expectations are bigger than his enjoyments, and his fears and jealousies more troublesome than the evils themselves which he is so much afraid of. He is liable to a great many inconveniencies every moment of his life, and is continually insecure, not only of the good things of this life,

life, but even of life itſelf. And beſides all this, after all his endeavours to the contrary, he finds himſelf naturally to dread a ſuperior being that can defeat all his deſigns, and diſappoint all his hopes, and make him miſerable beyond all his fears. He has oftentimes ſecret miſgivings concerning another life after this, and fearful apprehenſions of an inviſible judge; and thereupon he is full of anxiety concerning his condition in another world, and ſometimes plunged into that anguiſh and deſpair, that he grows weary of himſelf. So that the Atheiſt deprives himſelf of all the comfort that the apprehenſions of a God can give a man, and yet is liable to all the trouble and diſquiet of thoſe apprehenſions.

I do not ſay that theſe inconveniencies do happen to all; but every one is in danger of them. For man's nature is evidently ſo contrived, as does plainly diſcover how unable he is to make himſelf happy: ſo that he muſt neceſſarily look abroad, and ſeek for happineſs ſomewhere elſe. And if there be no ſuperior being, in whoſe care of him he may repoſe his confidence, and quiet his mind; if he have no comfortable expectations of another life to ſuſtain him under the evils and calamities he is liable to in this world, he is certainly *of all creatures the moſt miſerable.* There are none of us but may happen to fall into thoſe circumſtances of danger, or want, or pain, or ſome other ſort of calamity, that we can have no hopes of relief or comfort but from God alone; none in all the world to fly to but him. And what would men do in ſuch a caſe if it were not for God? Human nature is moſt certainly liable to deſperate exigencies, and he is not happy that is not provided againſt the worſt that may happen. It is bad to be reduced to ſuch a condition as to be deſtitute of all comfort. And yet men are many times brought to that extremity, that if it were not for God, they would not know what to do with themſelves, or how to enjoy themſelves for one hour, or to entertain their thoughts with any comfortable conſiderations under their preſent anguiſh and ſufferings. All men naturally fly to God in extremity; and the moſt Atheiſtical perſon in the world, when he is forſaken of all hopes of any other relief, is forced to acknowledge him, and would be glad to have ſuch a friend.

Can

Can it then be a wiſe and reaſonable deſign, to endeavour to baniſh the belief of a God out of the world? Not to ſay how impious it is in reſpect of God, nothing can be more malicious to men, and more effectually undermine the only foundation of our happineſs. For if there were no God in the world, man would be in a much more wretched and diſconſolate condition than the creatures below him: for they are only ſenſible of preſent pain; and, when it is upon them, they bear it as they can. But they are not at all apprehenſive of evils at a diſtance, nor tormented with the fearful proſpect of what may befal them hereafter: nor are they plunged into deſpair, upon the conſideration that the evils they lie under are like to continue, and are incapable of a remedy. And as they have no apprehenſion of theſe things, ſo they need no comfort againſt them. But mankind is liable to all the ſame evils, and many others; which are ſo much the greater, becauſe they are aggravated, and ſet on by the reſtleſs workings of our minds, and exaſperated by the ſmart reflexions and frettings of our own thoughts. And if there be no God, we are wholly without comfort under all theſe, and without any other remedy than what time will give. For, if the providence of God be taken away, what ſecurity have we againſt thoſe innumerable dangers and miſchiefs to which human nature is continually expoſed? what conſolation under them, when we are reduced to that condition that no creature can give us any hopes of relief? But if we believe that there is a God that takes care of us, and we be careful to pleaſe him, this cannot but be a mighty comfort to us, both under the preſent ſenſe of affliction, and the apprehenſion of evils at a diſtance. For in that caſe we are ſecure of one of theſe three things; either that God by his providence will prevent the evils we fear, if that be beſt for us; or that he will ſupport us under them when they are preſent, and add to our ſtrength as he increaſeth our burden; or that he will make them the occaſion of a greater good to us, by turning them either to our advantage in this world, or the increaſe of our happineſs in the next. Now, every one of theſe conſiderations has a great deal of comfort in it; for which, if there were no God, there could be no ground: nay, on the contrary,

the moſt real foundation of our unhappineſs would be laid in our reaſon; and we ſhould be ſo much more miſerable than the beaſts, by how much we have a quicker apprehenſion and a deeper conſideration of things.

So that, if a man had arguments ſufficient to perſuade him that there is no God, as there is infinite reaſon to the contrary; yet the belief of a God is ſo neceſſary to the comfort and happineſs of our lives, that a wiſe man could not but be heartily troubled to quit ſo pleaſant an error, and to part with a deluſion which is apt to yield ſuch unſpeakable ſatisfaction to the mind of man. Did but men conſider the true notion of God, he would appear to be ſo lovely a being, and ſo full of goodneſs, and of all deſirable perfections, that even thoſe very perſons who are of ſuch irregular underſtandings as not to believe that there is a God, yet could not, if they underſtood themſelves, refrain from wiſhing with all their hearts that there were one. For is it not really deſirable to every man, that there ſhould be ſuch a being in the world as takes care of the frame of it, that it do not run into confuſion, and in that diſorder ruin mankind? that there ſhould be ſuch a being, as takes particular care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good; as underſtands all our wants, and is able and willing to relieve us in our greateſt ſtraits, when nothing elſe can; to preſerve us in our greateſt dangers, to aſſiſt us againſt our worſt enemies, and to comfort us under our ſharpeſt ſufferings, when all other things ſet themſelves againſt us? Is it not every man's intereſt, that there ſhould be ſuch a governor of the world, as really deſigns our happineſs, and hath omitted nothing that is neceſſary to it; as would govern us for our advantage, and will require nothing of us but what is for our good, and yet will infinitely reward us for the doing of that which is beſt for ourſelves? that will puniſh any man that ſhould go about to injure us, or to deal otherwiſe with us than himſelf in the like caſe would be dealt withal by us? in a word, ſuch a one as is ready to be reconciled to us when we have offended him; and is ſo far from taking little advantages againſt us for every failing, that he is willing to pardon our moſt wilful miſcarriages upon our repentance and amendment?

And

And we have reaſon to believe God to be ſuch a being, if he be at all.

Why then ſhould any man be troubled that there is ſuch a being as this, or think himſelf concerned to ſhut him out of the world? How could ſuch a governor as this be wanting in the world, that is ſo great a comfort and ſecurity to mankind, and *the confidence of all the ends of the earth?* If God be ſuch a being as I have deſcribed, woe to the world if it were without him. This would be a thouſand times greater loſs to mankind, and of more diſmal conſequence, and, if it were true, ought to affect us with more grief and horror, than the extinguiſhing of the ſun.

Let but all things be well conſidered, and I am very confident, that if a wiſe and conſiderate man were left to himſelf and his own choice, to wiſh the greateſt good to himſelf he could deviſe; after he had ſearched heaven and earth, the ſum of all his wiſhes would be this, That there were juſt ſuch a being as God is: nor would he chuſe any other benefactor, or friend, or protector for himſelf, or governor for the whole world, than infinite power, conducted and managed by infinite wiſdom, and goodneſs, and juſtice; which is the true notion of a God.

Nay, ſo neceſſary is God to the happineſs of mankind, that though there were no God; yet the Atheiſt himſelf, upon ſecond thoughts, would judge it convenient that the generality of men ſhould believe that there is one. For when the Atheiſt had attained his end, and, if it were a thing poſſible, had blotted the notion of a God out of the minds of men, mankind would, in all probability, grow ſo melancholy, and ſo unruly a thing, that he himſelf would think it fit in policy to contribute his beſt endeavours to the reſtoring of men to their former belief. Thus hath God ſecured the belief of himſelf in the world againſt all attempts to the contrary; not only by riveting the notion of himſelf into our natures, but likewiſe by making the belief of his being neceſſary to the peace and tranquillity of our minds, and to the quiet and happineſs of human ſociety.

So that, if we conſult our reaſon, we cannot but believe that there is; if our intereſt, we cannot but heartily wiſh that there were ſuch a being as God in the world.

Every thing within us and without us gives notice of him. His name is written upon our hearts; and in every creature there are ſome prints and footſteps of him. Every moment we feel our dependence upon him; and do, by daily experience, find, that we can neither be happy without him, nor think ourſelves ſo.

I confeſs, it is not a wicked man's intereſt, if he reſolve to continue ſuch, that there ſhould be a God. But then it is not mens intereſt to be wicked. It is for the general good of human ſociety, and conſequently of particular perſons, to be true and juſt; it is for mens health to be temperate: and ſo I could inſtance in all other virtues. But this is the myſtery of Atheiſm: Men are wedded to their luſts, and reſolved upon a wicked courſe; and ſo it becomes their intereſt to wiſh there were no God, and to believe ſo, if they can: whereas, if men were minded to live righteouſly, and ſoberly, and virtuouſly in the world, to believe a God would be no hinderance or prejudice to any ſuch deſign, but very much for the advancement and furtherance of it. Men that are good and virtuous, do eaſily believe a God; ſo that it is vehemently to be ſuſpected, that nothing but the ſtrength of mens luſts, and the power of vitious inclinations, do ſway their minds and ſet a bias upon their underſtandings towards Atheiſm.

2. Atheiſm is imprudent, becauſe it is unſafe in the iſſue. The Atheiſt contends againſt the religious man that there is no God: but upon ſtrange inequality and odds; for he ventures his eternal intereſt; whereas the religious man ventures only the loſs of his luſts, which it is much better for him to be without, or at the utmoſt of ſome temporal convenience; and all this while is inwardly more contented and happy, and uſually more healthful, and perhaps meets with more reſpect and faithfuller friends, and lives in a more ſecure and flouriſhing condition, and more free from the evils and puniſhments of this world, than the Atheiſtical perſon does. However, it is not much that he ventures: and, after this life, if there be no God, is as well as he; but, if there be a God, is infinitely better, even as much as unſpeakable and eternal happineſs is better than extreme and endleſs miſery. So that, if the arguments for and againſt a God were equal,

qual, and it were an even queſtion, Whether there were one or not? yet the hazard and danger is ſo infinitely unequal, that in point of prudence and intereſt every man were obliged to incline to the affirmative; and, whatever doubts he might have about it, to chuſe the ſafeſt ſide of the queſtion, and to make that the principle to live by. For he that acts wiſely, and is a thoroughly prudent man, will be provided againſt all events, and will take care to ſecure the main chance whatever happens. But the Atheiſt, in caſe things ſhould fall out contrary to his belief and expectation, hath made no proviſion for this caſe. If, contrary to his confidence, it ſhould prove in the iſſue that there is a God, the man is loſt and undone for ever. If the Atheiſt, when he dies, ſhould find that his ſoul remains after his body, and has only quitted its lodging; how will this man be amazed and blanked, when, contrary to his expectation, he ſhall find himſelf in a new and ſtrange place, amidſt a world of ſpirits, entered upon an everlaſting and unchangeable ſtate? How ſadly will the man be diſappointed, when he finds all things otherwiſe than he had ſtated and determined them in this world? When he comes to appear before that God whom he hath denied, and againſt whom he hath ſpoken as deſpiteful things as he could, who can imagine the pale and guilty looks of this man, and how he will ſhiver and tremble *for the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majeſty?* How will he be ſurpriſed with terrors on every ſide, to find himſelf thus unexpectedly and irrecoverably plunged into a ſtate of ruin and deſperation! And thus things may happen for all this man's confidence now. For our belief or diſbelief of a thing does not alter the nature of the thing. We cannot fancy things into being, or make them vaniſh into nothing, by the ſtubborn confidence of our imaginations. Things are as ſullen as we are, and will be what they are, whatever we think of them. And, if there be a God, a man cannot, by an obſtinate diſbelief of him, make him ceaſe to be, any more than a man can put out the ſun by winking.

And thus I have, as briefly and clearly as I could, endeavoured to ſhew the ignorance and folly of ſpeculative Atheiſm in denying the exiſtence of God. And now it

will be leſs needful to ſpeak of the other two principles of religion, the immortality of the ſoul, and future rewards. For no man can have any reaſonable ſcruple about theſe, who believes that there is a God: becauſe no man that owns the exiſtence of an infinite ſpirit, can doubt of the poſſibility of a finite ſpirit; that is, ſuch a thing as is immaterial, and does not contain any principle of corruption in itſelf. And there is no man that believes the goodneſs of God, but muſt be inclined to think, that he hath made ſome things for as long a duration as they are capable of. Nor can any man, that acknowledgeth the holy and juſt providence of God, and that he loves righteouſneſs, and hates iniquity, and that he is a magiſtrate and governor of the world, and conſequently concerned to countenance the obedience and to puniſh the violation of his laws; and that does withal conſider the promiſcuous diſpenſations many times of God's providence in this world: I ſay, no man that acknowledges all this, can think it unreaſonable to conclude, that after this life good men ſhall be rewarded, and ſinners puniſhed. I have done with the firſt ſort of irreligious perſons, the ſpeculative Atheiſt. I ſhall ſpeak but briefly of the other.

Secondly, The *practical* Atheiſt, who is wicked and irreligious, notwithſtanding he does in ſome ſort believe that there is a God, and a future ſtate, he is likewiſe guilty of prodigious folly. The principle of the ſpeculative Atheiſt argues more ignorance, but the practice of the other argues greater folly. Not to believe a God, and another life, for which there is ſo much evidence of reaſon, is great ignorance and folly: but it is the higheſt madneſs, when a man does believe theſe things, to live as if he did not believe them; when a man does not doubt but that there is a God, and that according as he demeans himſelf towards him he will make him happy or miſerable for ever, yet to live ſo as if he were certain of the contrary, and as no man in reaſon can live but he that is well aſſured that there is no God. It was a ſhrewd ſaying of the old monk, That two kind of priſons would ſerve for all offenders in the world; an inquiſition, and a bedlam: If any man ſhould deny the being of a God, and the immortality of the ſoul, ſuch a one ſhould be put into the firſt of theſe, the inquiſition,

as

as being a deſperate heretick: but if any man ſhould profeſs to believe theſe things, and yet allow himſelf in any known wickedneſs, ſuch a one ſhould be put into bedlam; becauſe there cannot be a greater folly and madneſs, than for a man in matters of greateſt moment and concernment to act againſt his beſt reaſon and underſtanding, and by his life to contradict his belief. Such a man does periſh with his eyes open, and knowingly undoes himſelf: he runs upon the greateſt dangers which he clearly ſees to be before him, and precipitates himſelf into thoſe evils which he profeſſes to believe to be real and intolerable; and wilfully neglects the obtaining of that unſpeakable good and happineſs which he is perſuaded is certain and attainable. Thus much for the ſecond way of confirmation.

Thirdly, The third way of confirmation ſhall be, by endeavouring to vindicate religion from thoſe common imputations which ſeem to charge it with ignorance or imprudence. And they are chiefly theſe three.

1. Credulity.
2. Singularity.
3. Making a fooliſh bargain.

1. Credulity. Say they, The foundation of religion is the belief of thoſe things for which we have no ſufficient reaſon, and conſequently of which we can have no good aſſurance; as, the belief of a God, and of a future ſtate after this life; things which we never ſaw, nor did experience, nor ever ſpoke with any body that did. Now, it ſeems to argue too great a forwardneſs and eaſineſs of belief, to aſſent to any thing upon inſufficient grounds.

To this I anſwer,

1. That if there be ſuch a being as a God, and ſuch a thing as a future ſtate after this life, it cannot, as I ſaid before, in reaſon be expected, that we ſhould have the evidence of ſenſe for ſuch things: for he that believes a God, believes ſuch a being as hath all perfections; among which this is one, that he is a ſpirit; and, conſequently, that he is inviſible, and cannot be ſeen. He likewiſe that believes another life after this, profeſſeth to believe a ſtate of which in this life we have no trial and experience. Beſides, if this were a good objection, That no man ever ſaw theſe things, it ſtrikes at the

the Atheiſt as well as us: for no man ever ſaw the world to be from eternity; nor Epicurus his atoms, of which notwithſtanding he believes the world was made.

2. We have the beſt evidence for theſe things which they are capable of at preſent, ſuppoſing they were.

3. Thoſe who deny theſe principles, muſt be much more credulous; that is, believe things upon incomparable leſs evidence of reaſon. The Atheiſt looks upon all that are religious as a company of credulous fools: but he, for his part, pretends to be wiſer than to believe any thing for company; he cannot entertain things upon thoſe ſlight grounds which move other men; if you would win his aſſent to any thing, you muſt give him a clear demonſtration for it. Now, there is no way to deal with this man of reaſon, this rigid exacter of ſtrict demonſtration for things which are not capable of it, but by ſhewing him, that he is an hundred times more credulous, that he begs more principles, takes more things for granted, without offering to prove them, and aſſents to more ſtrange concluſions upon weaker grounds, than thoſe whom he ſo much accuſeth of credulity.

And, to evidence this, I ſhall briefly give you an account of the Atheiſt's creed, and preſent you with a catalogue of the fundamental articles of his faith. He believes that there is no God, nor poſſibly can be; and, conſequently, that the wiſe, as well as unwiſe, of all ages, have been miſtaken, except himſelf, and a few more. He believes, that either all the world have been frighted with an apparition of their own fancy, or that they have moſt unnaturally conſpired together to cozen themſelves; or that this notion of a God is a trick of policy, though the greateſt princes and politicians do not at this day know ſo much, nor have done time out of mind. He believes, either that the heavens, and the earth, and all things in them, had no original cauſe of their being, or elſe that they were made by chance, and happened, he knows not how, to be as they are; and that in this laſt ſhuffling of matter, all things have, by great good fortune, fallen out as happily and as regularly, as if the greateſt wiſdom had contrived them; but yet he is reſolved to believe, that there was no wiſdom in the contrivance of them. He believes, that matter of itſelf is

utterly

utterly void of all ſenſe, underſtanding, and liberty; but, for all that, he is of opinion, that the parts of matter may now and then happen to be ſo conveniently diſpoſed, as to have all theſe qualities, and moſt dexterouſly to perform all thoſe fine and free operations which the ignorant attribute to ſpirits.

This is the ſum of his belief. And it is a wonder, that there ſhould be found any perſon pretending to reaſon or wit that can aſſent to ſuch a heap of abſurdities; which are ſo groſs and palpable that they may be felt. So that if every man had his due, it will certainly fall to the Atheiſt's ſhare, to be the moſt credulous perſon; that is, to believe things upon the ſlighteſt reaſons: for he does not pretend to prove any thing of all this; only he finds himſelf, he knows not why, inclined to believe ſo, and to laugh at thoſe that do not.

II. The ſecond imputation is, ſingularity; the affectation whereof is unbecoming a wiſe man. To this charge I anſwer,

1. If by *religion* be meant the belief of the principles of religion, That there is a God, and a providence; that our ſouls are immortal; and that there are rewards to be expected after this life: theſe are ſo far from being ſingular opinions, that they are and always have been the general opinion of mankind, even of the moſt barbarous nations; inſomuch that the hiſtories of ancient times do hardly furniſh us with the names of above five or ſix perſons who denied a God. And Lucretius acknowledgeth that Epicurus was the firſt who did oppoſe thoſe great foundations of religion, the providence of God, and the immortality of the ſoul: *Primum Grajus homo, &c.* meaning Epicurus.

2. If by *religion* be meant a living up to thoſe principles, that is, to act conformably to our beſt reaſon and underſtanding, and to live as it does become thoſe who do believe a God and a future ſtate; this is acknowledged, even by thoſe who live otherwiſe, to be the part of every wiſe man, and the contrary to be the very madneſs of folly, and height of diſtraction; nothing being more ordinary, than for men who live wickedly to acknowledge that they ought to do otherwiſe.

3. Though, according to the common courſe and practice

dice of the world, it be ſomewhat ſingular for men truly and thoroughly to live up to the principles of their religion; yet ſingularity in this matter is ſo far from being a reflexion upon any man's prudence, that it is a ſingular commendation of it. In two caſes ſingularity is very commendable.

1ſt, When there is a neceſſity of it in order to a man's greateſt intereſt and happineſs. I think it to be a reaſonable account for any man to give, why he does not live as the greateſt part of the world do, that he has no mind to die as they do, and to periſh with them; he is not diſpoſed to be a fool, and to be miſerable for company; he has no inclination to have his laſt end like theirs *who know not God, and obey not the goſpel of his Son, and ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*

2dly, It is very commendable to be ſingular in any excellency; and I have ſhewn that religion is the greateſt excellency. To be ſingular in any thing that is wiſe, and worthy, and excellent, is not a diſparagement, but a praiſe. Every man would chuſe to be thus ſingular.

III. The third imputation is, That religion is a fooliſh bargain; becauſe they who are religious, hazard the parting with a preſent and certain happineſs, for that which is future and uncertain.

To this I anſwer,

1. Let it be granted, that the aſſurance which we have of future rewards falls ſhort of the evidence of ſenſe. For I doubt not, but that ſaying of our Saviour, *Bleſſed is he who hath believed, and not ſeen*; and thoſe expreſſions of the Apoſtle, *We walk by faith, and not by ſight*, and, *Faith is the evidence of things not ſeen*, are intended by way of abatement and diminution to the evidence of faith; and do ſignify, that the report and teſtimony of others, is not ſo great evidence as that of our own ſenſes. And though we have ſufficient aſſurance of another ſtate; yet no man can think we have ſo great evidence, as if we ourſelves had been in the other world, and ſeen how all things are there.

2. We have ſufficient aſſurance of theſe things, and ſuch as may beget in us a well-grounded confidence, and free us from all doubts of the contrary, and perſuade a reaſonable

reaſonable man to venture his greateſt intereſts in this world upon the ſecurity he hath of another. For,

1ſt, We have as much aſſurance of theſe things, as things future and at a diſtance are capable of; and he is a very unreaſonable man that would deſire more. Future and inviſible things are not capable of the evidence of ſenſe: but we have the greateſt rational evidence for them; and in this every reaſonable man ought to reſt ſatisfied.

2dly, We have as much as is abundantly ſufficient to juſtify every man's diſcretion, who, for the great and eternal things of another world, hazards, or parts with the poor and tranſitory things of this life. And, for the clearing of this, it will be worth our conſidering, that the greateſt affairs of this world, and the moſt important concernments of this life, are all conducted only by moral demonſtrations. Men every day venture their lives and eſtates only upon moral aſſurance. For inſtance: Men who were never at the Eaſt or Weſt Indies, or in Turky or Spain, yet do venture their whole eſtate in traffick thither, though they have no mathematical demonſtration, but only moral aſſurance, that there are ſuch places. Nay, which is more, men every day eat and drink, though I think no man can demonſtrate, out of Euclid, or Apollonius, that his baker, or brewer, or cook, have not conveyed poiſon into his meat or drink. And that man that would be ſo wiſe and cautious, as not to eat or drink till he could demonſtrate this to himſelf, I know no other remedy for him, but that in great gravity and wiſdom he muſt die for fear of death. And for any man to urge, that though men in temporal affairs proceed upon moral aſſurance, yet there is greater aſſurance required to make men ſeek heaven, and avoid hell, ſeems to me to be highly unreaſonable. For ſuch an aſſurance of things as will make men circumſpect and careful to avoid a leſſer danger, ought in all reaſon to awaken men much more to the avoiding of a greater: ſuch an aſſurance as will ſharpen mens deſires and quicken their endeavours for the obtaining of a leſſer good, ought in all reaſon to animate men more powerfully, and to inſpire them with a greater vigour and induſtry in the purſuit of that which is infinitely greater.

For

For why the ſame aſſurance ſhould not operate, as well in a great danger as in a leſs, in a great good as in a ſmall and inconſiderable one, I can ſee no reaſon; unleſs men will ſay, that the greatneſs of an evil and danger is an encouragement to men to run upon it; and that the greatneſs of any good and happineſs, ought in reaſon to diſhearten men from the purſuit of it.

And now I think I may with reaſon intreat ſuch as are Atheiſtically inclined, to conſider theſe things ſeriouſly and impartially; and if there be weight in theſe conſiderations which I have offered to them to ſway with reaſonable men, I would beg of ſuch, that they would not ſuffer themſelves to be biaſſed by prejudice or paſſion, or the intereſt of any luſt, or worldly advantage, to a contrary perſuaſion.

Firſt, I would intreat them ſeriouſly and diligently to conſider theſe things, becauſe they are of ſo great moment and concernment to every man. If any thing in the world deſerve our ſerious ſtudy and conſideration, theſe principles of religion do. For what can import us more to be ſatisfied in, than whether there be a God, or not? whether our ſouls ſhall periſh with our bodies, or be immortal, and ſhall continue for ever? and if ſo, whether in that eternal ſtate which remains for men after this life, they ſhall not be happy or miſerable for ever, according as they have demeaned themſelves in this world? If theſe things be ſo, they are of infinite conſequence to us; and therefore it highly concerns us, to inquire diligently about them, and to ſatisfy our minds concerning them one way or other. For theſe are not matters to be ſlightly and ſuperficially thought upon; much leſs, as the way of Atheiſtical men is, to be played and jeſted withal. There is no greater argument of a light and inconſiderate perſon, than profanely to ſcoff at religion. It is a ſign that that man hath no regard to himſelf, and that he is not touched with a ſenſe of his own intereſt, who loves to be jeſting with edged tools, and to play with life and death. This is the very madman that Solomon ſpeaks of, *who caſteth firebrands, arrows, and death; and ſaith, Am I not in ſport?* Prov. xxvi. 18. To examine ſeverely and debate ſeriouſly the principles of religion, is a thing worthy of a wiſe man:

man: but if any man shall turn religion into raillery, and think to confute it by two or three bold jests, this man doth not render religion, but himself ridiculous, in the opinion of all considerate men; because he sports with his own life. If the principles of religion were doubtful and uncertain, yet they concern us so nearly, that we ought to be serious in the examination of them. And though they were never so clear and evident, yet they may be made ridiculous by vain and frothy men; as the gravest and wisest person in the world may be abused, by being put into a fool's coat, and the most noble and excellent poem may be debased, and made vile, by being turned into burlesque. But of this I shall have occasion to speak more largely in my next discourse.

So that it concerns every man, that would not trifle away his soul, and fool himself into irrecoverable misery, with the greatest seriousness to inquire into these matters, whether they be so or not, and patiently to consider the arguments which are brought for them. For many have miscarried about these things, not because there is not reason and evidence enough for them, but because they have not had patience enough to consider them.

Secondly, Consider these things impartially. All wicked men are of a party against religion. Some lust or interest engageth them against it. Hence it comes to pass, that they are apt to slight the strongest arguments that can be brought for it, and to cry up very weak ones against it. Men do generally, and without difficulty, assent to mathematical truths, because it is no body's interest to deny them: but men are slow to believe moral and divine truths, because by their lusts and interests they are prejudiced against them. And therefore you may observe, that the more virtuously any man lives, and the less he is inslaved to any lust, the more ready he is to entertain the principles of religion.

Therefore, when you are examining these matters, do not take into consideration any sensual or worldly interest, but deal clearly and impartially with yourselves. Let not temporal and little advantages sway you against a greater and more durable interest. Think thus with yourselves: That you have not the making of things true

or falſe; but that the truth and exiſtence of things is already fixed, and ſettled; and that the principles of religion are already either determinately true or falſe before you think of them: either there is a God, or there is not; either your ſouls are immortal, or they are not; one of theſe is certain and neceſſary, and is not now to be altered. The truth of things will not comply with our conceits, and bend itſelf to our intereſts. Therefore do not think what you would have to be; but conſider impartially what is, and, if it be, will be, whether you will or no. Do not reaſon thus: I would fain be wicked; and therefore it is my intereſt that there ſhould be no God, nor no life after this; and therefore I will endeavour to prove that there is no ſuch thing, and will ſhew all the favour I can to that ſide of the queſtion: I will bend my underſtanding and wit to ſtrengthen the negative, and will ſtudy to make it as true as I can. This is fond, becauſe it is the way to cheat thyſelf; and that we may do as often as we pleaſe: but the nature of things will not be impoſed upon. If then thou be as wiſe as thou oughteſt to be, thou wilt reaſon thus with thyſelf: My higheſt intereſt is, not to be deceived about theſe matters; therefore, ſetting aſide all other conſiderations, I will endeavour to know the truth, and yield to that.

And now it is time to draw towards a concluſion of this long diſcourſe. And that which I have all this while been endeavouring to convince men of, and to perſuade them to, is no other but what God himſelf doth particularly recommend to us as proper for human conſideration: *Unto man he ſaid, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom; and to depart from evil, is underſtanding.* Whoever pretends to reaſon, and calls himſelf a man, is obliged to acknowledge God, and to demean himſelf religiouſly towards him: for God is to the underſtanding of man, as the light of the ſun is to our eyes; the firſt, and the plaineſt, and the moſt glorious object of it. He fills heaven and earth; and every thing in them does repreſent him to us. Which way ſoever we turn ourſelves, we are encountered with clear evidences and ſenſible demonſtrations of a Deity: for (as the Apoſtle reaſons) *the inviſible things of him from the creation*

creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους, *so that they are without excuse,* Rom. i. 20.; that is, those men that know not God, have no apology to make for themselves. Or, if men do know and believe that there is such a being as God, not to consider the proper consequences of such a principle, not to demean ourselves towards him, as becomes our relation to him, and dependence upon him, and the duty which we naturally owe him; this is great stupidity and inconsiderateness.

And yet he that considers the lives and actions of the greatest part of men, would verily think that they understood nothing of all this. Therefore the scripture represents wicked men as without understanding: *It is a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them,* Deut. xxxii. 28.; and elsewhere, *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?* Psal. xiv. 4.; not that they are destitute of the natural faculty of understanding, but they do not use it as they ought: they are not blind, but they wink; *they detain the truth of God in unrighteousness; and though they know God, yet they do not glorify him as God,* nor suffer the apprehensions of him to have a due influence upon their hearts and lives.

Men generally stand very much upon the credit and reputation of their understandings, and, of all things in the world, hate to be accounted fools, because it is so great a reproach. The best way to avoid this imputation, and to bring off the credit of our understandings, is, to be truly religious; *to fear the Lord, and to depart from evil.* For certainly there is no such imprudent person, as he that neglects God, and his soul, and is careless and slothful about his everlasting concernments; because this man acts contrary to his truest reason, and best interest: he neglects his own safety, and is active to procure his own ruin: he flies from happiness, and runs away from it as fast as he can; but pursues misery, and makes haste to be undone. Hence it is that Solomon does all along in the Proverbs give the title of *fool* to a wicked man, as if it were his proper name, and the fittest character of him; because he is so eminently such. There is no fool to the sinner, who every moment ven-

tures his ſoul, and lays his everlaſting intereſt at the ſtake. Every time a man provokes God, he does the greateſt miſchief to himſelf that can be imagined. A madman, that cuts himſelf, and tears his own fleſh, and daſhes his head againſt the ſtones, does not act ſo unreaſonably as he; becauſe he is not ſo ſenſible of what he does. Wickedneſs is a kind of voluntary frenzy, and a choſen diſtraction: and every ſinner does wilder and more extravagant things, than any man can do that is crazed, and out of his wits; only with this ſad difference, that he knows better what he does. For to them who believe another life after this, an eternal ſtate of happineſs or miſery in another world, which is but a reaſonable *poſtulatum* or demand among Chriſtians, there is nothing in mathematicks more demonſtrable than the folly of wicked men; for it is not a clearer and more evident principle, That the whole is greater than a part, than that eternity, and the concernments of it, are to be preferred before time.

I will therefore put the matter into a temporal caſe, that wicked men, who underſtand any thing of the rules and principles of worldly wiſdom, may ſee the imprudence of an irreligious and ſinful courſe, and be convinced, *that this their way is their folly, even themſelves being judges.*

Is that man wiſe, as to his body, and his health, who only clothes his hands, but leaves his whole body naked; who provides only againſt the toothach, and neglects whole troops of mortal diſeaſes that are ready to ruſh in upon him? Juſt thus does he who takes care only for this vile body, but neglects his precious and immortal ſoul; who is very ſolicitous to prevent ſmall and temporal inconveniencies, but takes no care *to eſcape the damnation of hell.*

Is he a prudent man, as to his temporal eſtate, that lays deſigns only for a day, without any proſpect to, or proviſion for the remaining part of his life? Even ſo does he that provides for the ſhort time of this life, but takes no care for all eternity; which is to be wiſe for a moment, but a fool for ever; and to act as untowardly, and as croſsly to the reaſon of things, as can be imagined;

ned; to regard time as if it were eternity, and to neglect eternity as if it were but a ſhort time.

Do we count him a wiſe man, who is wiſe in any thing but in his own proper profeſſion and employment; wiſe for every body but himſelf; who is ingenious to contrive his own miſery, and to do himſelf a miſchief, but is dull and ſtupid as to the deſigning of any real benefit and advantage to himſelf? Such a one is he, who is ingenious in his calling, but a bad Chriſtian; for Chriſtianity is more our proper calling and profeſſion, than the very trades we live upon: and ſuch is every ſinner, who is *wiſe to do evil, but to do good hath no underſtanding.*

Is it wiſdom in any man, to neglect and diſoblige him who is his beſt friend, and can be his ſoreſt enemy? or with one weak troop, to go out to meet him that comes againſt him with thouſands of thouſands? to fly a ſmall danger, and run upon a greater? Thus does every wicked man that neglects and contemns God, *who can ſave, or deſtroy him*; who ſtrives with his *maker, and provoketh the Lord to jealouſy*, and, with the ſmall and inconſiderable forces of a man, takes the field againſt the *mighty God, the Lord of hoſts*; who *fears them that can kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do; but fears not him, who, after he hath killed, can deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell.* And thus does he who, for fear of any thing in this world, ventures to diſpleaſe God: for in ſo doing, he runs away from men, and *falls into the hands of the living God*; he flies from a temporal danger, and leaps into hell.

Is not he an imprudent man, who, in matters of greateſt moment and concernment, neglects opportunities never to be retrieved; who ſtanding upon the ſhore, and ſeeing the tide making haſte towards him apace, and that he hath but a few minutes to ſave himſelf, yet will lay himſelf to ſleep there, till the cruel ſea ruſh in upon him, and overwhelm him? And is he any better, who trifles away this day of God's grace and patience, and fooliſhly adjourns the neceſſary work of repentance, and the weighty buſineſs of religion, to a dying hour?

And, to put an end to theſe queſtions, Is he wiſe who hopes to attain the end without the means, nay, by means that are quite contrary to it? Such is every wicked man,

who hopes to be bleſſed hereafter without being holy here, and to be happy, that is, to find a pleaſure in the enjoyment of God, and in the company of holy ſpirits, by rendering himſelf as unſuitable and unlike to them as he can.

Wouldſt thou then be truly wiſe? be wiſe for thyſelf, wiſe for thy ſoul, wiſe for eternity. Reſolve upon a religious courſe of life. *Fear God, and depart from evil.* Look beyond things preſent and ſenſible, unto things which are not ſeen, and are eternal. Labour to ſecure the great intereſts of another world, and refer all the actions of this ſhort and dying life, to that ſtate which will ſhortly begin, but never have an end: and this will approve itſelf to be wiſdom at the laſt, whatever the world judge of it now. For not that which is approved of men now, but what ſhall finally be approved by God, is true wiſdom; that which is eſteemed ſo by him who is the fountain and original of all wiſdom; the firſt rule and meaſure, the beſt and moſt competent judge of it.

I deny not, but that thoſe that are wicked, and neglect religion, may think themſelves wiſe, and may enjoy this their deluſion for a while. But there is a time a-coming, when the moſt profane and Atheiſtical, who now account it a piece of gallantry, and an argument of a great ſpirit, and of a more than common wit and underſtanding, to ſlight God, and to baffle religion, and to level all the diſcourſes of another world with the poetical deſcriptions of the Fairy-land; I ſay, there is a day a-coming, when all theſe witty fools ſhall be unhappily undeceived, and, not being able to enjoy their deluſion any longer, ſhall call themſelves fools for ever.

But why ſhould I uſe ſo much importunity to perſuade men to that which is ſo excellent, ſo uſeful, and ſo neceſſary? The thing itſelf hath allurements in it beyond all arguments: for, if religion be the beſt knowledge and wiſdom, I cannot offer any thing beyond this to your underſtandings, to raiſe your eſteem of it; I can preſent nothing beyond this to your affections, to excite your love and deſire. All that can be done, is, to ſet the thing before men, and to offer it to their choice: and if mens natural deſire of wiſdom, and knowledge, and happineſs, will not perſuade them to be religious, it is in vain to

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uſe arguments; if the ſight of theſe beauties will not charm mens affections, it is to no purpoſe to go about to compel a liking, and to urge and puſh forward a match, to the making whereof conſent is neceſſary. Religion is matter of our freeſt choice; and if men will obſtinately and wilfully ſet themſelves againſt it, there is no remedy. *Pertinaciæ nullum remedium poſuit Deus*, "God "has provided no remedy for the obſtinacy of men;" but if they will chuſe to be fools, and to be miſerable, he will leave them to inherit their own choice, and to enjoy the portion of ſinners.

SERMON II.

The folly of ſcoffing at religion.

2 PET. iii. 3.

Knowing this firſt, that there ſhall come in the laſt days ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts.

KNowing this firſt. In the verſe before, the Apoſtle was ſpeaking of a famous prophecy, before the accompliſhment of which this ſort of men whom he calls *ſcoffers* ſhould come: *That ye may be mindful of the words which were ſpoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour: knowing this firſt, that there ſhall come in the laſt days ſcoffers*, &c.

The *prophecy* here ſpoken of, is probably that famous prediction of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem which is in the Prophet Daniel, and before the fulfilling whereof our Saviour expreſsly tells us *falſe prophets ſhould ariſe, and deceive many*, Matth. xxiv. 11.

Now the *ſcoffers* here ſpoken of, are the *falſe teachers* whom the Apoſtle had been deſcribing all along in the foregoing chapter: *There were falſe prophets alſo among the people, even as there ſhall be falſe teachers among you.* Theſe,

Theſe, he tells us, ſhould proceed to that height of impiety, as to ſcoff at the principles of religion, and to deride the expectations of a future judgment: *In the laſt days ſhall come ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts, and ſaying, Where is the promiſe of his coming?*

In ſpeaking to theſe words, I ſhall do theſe three things.

1. Conſider the nature of the ſin here mentioned; which is, ſcoffing at religion.

2. The character of the perſons that are charged with the guilt of this ſin. They are ſaid *to walk after their own luſts*.

3. I ſhall repreſent to you the heinouſneſs and the aggravations of this vice.

I. We will conſider the nature of the ſin here mentioned; which is, ſcoffing at religion: *There ſhall come ſcoffers.* Theſe, it ſeems, were a ſort of people that derided our Saviour's prediction of his coming to judge the world. So the Apoſtle tells us in the next words; that they ſaid, *Where is the promiſe of his coming?*

In thoſe times there was a common perſuaſion among Chriſtians, *that the day of the Lord was at hand*, as the Apoſtle elſewhere tells us, 2 *Theſſ.* ii. 2. Now this, it is probable, theſe ſcoffers twitted the Chriſtians withal; and becauſe Chriſt did not come when ſome looked for him, they concluded he would not come at all. Upon this they derided the Chriſtians, as enduring perſecution in a vain expectation of that which was never likely to happen. They ſaw all things continue *as they were from the beginning of the world*, notwithſtanding the apprehenſions of Chriſtians concerning the approaching end of it: *For ſince the fathers fell aſleep all things continue as they were, from the beginning of the world. Since the fathers fell aſleep, ἀφ' ἧς*, which may either be rendered *from the time*; or elſe, which ſeems more agreeable to the Atheiſtical diſcourſe of theſe men, *ſaving* (or *except*) *that the fathers are fallen aſleep, all things continue as they were*; ſaving that men die, and one generation ſucceeds another, they ſaw no change or alteration. They looked upon all things as going on in a conſtant courſe: one generation of men paſſed away, and another came in the room of it; but the world remained ſtill as it was. And thus, for ought

ought they knew, things might hold on for ever. So that the principles of theſe men ſeem to be much the ſame with thoſe of the Epicureans, who denied the providence of God, and the immortality of mens ſouls; and conſequently a future judgment which ſhould ſentence men to rewards and puniſhments in another world. Theſe great and fundamental principles of all religion they derided as the fancies and dreams of a company of melancholy men, who were weary of the world, and pleaſed themſelves with vain conceits of happineſs and eaſe in another life. But as for them, they believed none of thoſe things; and therefore gave all manner of licence and indulgence to their luſts.

But this belongs to the ſecond thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely,

II. The character which is here given of theſe ſcoffers. They are ſaid *to walk after their own luſts.* And no wonder if, when they denied a future judgment, they gave up themſelves to all manner of ſenſuality.

St. Jude, in his epiſtle, gives much the ſame character of them that St. Peter here does, ℣ 18. 19. *There ſhall come in the laſt days mockers, walking after their own ungodly luſts, ſenſual, not having the Spirit.* So that we ſee what kind of perſons they are who profanely ſcoff at religion; men of ſenſual ſpirits, and of licentious lives. For this character which the Apoſtle here gives of the ſcoffers of that age, was not an accidental thing which happened to thoſe perſons; but is the conſtant character of them who deride religion, and flows from the very temper and diſpoſition of thoſe who are guilty of this impiety; it is both the uſual preparation to it, and the natural conſequent of it.

To deride God and religion, is the higheſt kind of impiety. And men do not uſually arrive to this degree of wickedneſs at firſt, but they come to it by ſeveral ſteps. The Pſalmiſt very elegantly expreſſeth to us the ſeveral gradations by which men at laſt come to this horrid degree of impiety: *Bleſſed is the man that walketh not in the counſel of the ungodly, nor ſtandeth in the way of ſinners, nor ſitteth in the ſeat of the ſcorniful,* Pſal. i. 1. Men are uſually firſt corrupted by bad counſel and company, which is called *walking in the counſel of the ungodly*; next

next they habituate themſelves to their vitious practices, which is *ſtanding in the way of ſinners;* and then at laſt they take up and ſettle in a contempt of all religion, which is called *ſitting in the ſeat of the ſcornful.*

For when men once indulge themſelves in wicked courſes, the vitious inclinations of their minds ſway their underſtandings, and make them apt to diſbelieve thoſe truths which contradict their luſts. Every inordinate luſt and paſſion is a falſe bias upon mens underſtandings, which naturally draws toward Atheiſm: and when mens judgments are once biaſſed, they do not believe according to the evidence of things, but according to their humour and their intereſt. For when men live as if there were no God, it becomes expedient for them that there ſhould be none; and then they endeavour to perſuade themſelves ſo, and will be glad to find arguments to fortify themſelves in this perſuaſion. Men of diſſolute lives cry down religion, becauſe they would not be under the reſtraints of it; they are loth to be tied up by the ſtrict laws and rules of it: it is their intereſt, more than any reaſon they have againſt it, which makes them deſpiſe it; they hate it, becauſe they are reproved by it. So our Saviour tells us, that *men love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil. For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved,* John iii. 19. 20.

I remember it is the ſaying of one, who hath done more by his writings to debauch the age with Atheiſtical principles, than any man that lives in it, "That when "reaſon is againſt a man, then a man will be againſt "reaſon:" I am ſure this is the true account of ſuch mens enmity to religion. Religion is againſt them, and therefore they ſet themſelves againſt religion. The principles of religion, and the doctrines of the holy ſcriptures, are terrible enemies to wicked men; they are continually flying in their faces, and galling their conſciences: and this is that which makes them kick againſt religion, and ſpurn at the doctrines of that holy book. And this may probably be one reaſon why many men, who are obſerved to be ſufficiently dull in other matters, yet can talk profanely, and ſpeak againſt religion, with ſome kind of ſalt and ſmartneſs; becauſe religion is the thing that frets

frets them: and as in other things, ſo in this, *vexatio dat intellectum;* the inward trouble and vexation of their minds gives them ſome kind of wit and ſharpneſs in rallying upon religion. Their conſciences are galled by it, and this makes them winch and fling as if they had ſome mettle. For, let men pretend what they will, there is no eaſe and comfort of mind to be had from Atheiſtical principles. It is found by experience, that none are more apprehenſive of danger, or more fearful of death, than this ſort of men: even when they are in proſperity, they ever and anon feel many inward ſtings and laſhes; but when any great affliction or calamity overtakes them, they are the moſt poor-ſpirited creatures in the whole world.

The ſum is: The true reaſon why any man is an Atheiſt is, becauſe he is a wicked man. Religion would curb him in his luſts, and therefore he caſts it off, and puts all the ſcorn upon it he can. Beſides, that men think it ſome kind of apology for their vices, that they do not act contrary to any principle they profeſs: their practice is agreeable to what they pretend to believe; and ſo they think to vindicate themſelves, and their own practices, by laughing at thoſe for fools who believe any thing to the contrary.

III. The third thing I propounded was, to repreſent to you the heinouſneſs and the aggravations of this vice. And to make this out, we will make theſe three ſuppoſitions, which are as many as the thing will bear.

1. Suppoſe there were no God, and that the principles of religion were falſe.

2. Suppoſe the matter were doubtful, and the arguments equal on both ſides.

3. Suppoſe it certain that there is a God, and that the principles of religion are true. Put the caſe how we will, I ſhall ſhew that the humour is intolerable.

1*ſt*, Suppoſe there were no God, and that the principles of religion were falſe. Not that there is any reaſon for ſuch a ſuppoſition, but only to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of this humour. Put the caſe that theſe men were in the right, in denying the principles of religion, and that all that they pretend were true; yet ſo long as the generality of mankind believes the contrary, it is certainly

certainly a great rudeneſs, or incivility at leaſt, to deride and ſcoff at theſe things. Indeed, upon this ſuppoſition, there could be no ſuch thing as ſin; but yet it would be a great offence againſt the laws of civil converſation. Suppoſe then the Atheiſt were wiſer than all the world, and that he did, upon good grounds, know that all mankind, beſides himſelf and two or three more, were miſtaken about the matters of religion; yet, if he were either ſo wiſe or ſo civil as he ſhould be, he would keep all this to himſelf, and not affront other men about theſe things.

I remember that that law which God gave to the people of Iſrael, *Thou ſhalt not ſpeak evil of the rulers of thy people*, is rendered by Joſephus in a very different ſenſe, *What other nations account gods, let no man blaſpheme.* And this is not ſo different from the Hebrew, as at firſt ſight one would imagine; for the ſame Hebrew word ſignifies both gods and rulers. But whether this be the meaning of that law or not, there is a great deal of reaſon in the thing. For though every man have a right to diſpute againſt a falſe religion, and to urge it with all its abſurd and ridiculous conſequences, as the ancient fathers did in their diſputes with the Heathen; yet it is a barbarous incivility for any man ſcurrilouſly to make ſport with that which others account religion, not with any deſign to convince their reaſon, but only to provoke their rage.

But now the Atheiſt can pretend no obligation of conſcience why he ſhould ſo much as diſpute againſt the principles of religion, much leſs deride them. He that pretends to any religion, may pretend conſcience for oppoſing a contrary religion; but he that denies all religion, can pretend no conſcience for any thing. A man may be obliged indeed in reaſon and common humanity to free his neighbour from a hurtful error; but ſuppoſing there were no God, this notion of a Deity and the principles of religion have taken ſuch deep root in the mind of man, that either they are not to be extinguiſhed; or if they be, it would be no kindneſs to any man to endeavour it for him, becauſe it is not to be done, but with ſo much trouble and violence, that the remedy would be worſe than the diſeaſe.

For

For if this notion of a Deity be founded in a natural fear, it is in vain to attempt to expel it: for whatever violence may be offered to nature, by endeavouring to reaſon men into a contrary perſuaſion, nature will ſtill recoil, and at laſt return to itſelf, and then the fear will be augmented from the apprehenſion of the dangerous conſequences of ſuch an impiety. So that nothing can create more trouble to a man, than to endeavour to diſpoſſeſs him of this conceit; becauſe nature is but irritated by the conteſt, and the man's fears will be doubled upon him.

But if we ſuppoſe this apprehenſion of a Deity to have no foundation in nature, but to have had its riſe from tradition, which hath been confirmed in the world by the prejudice of education, the difficulty of removing it will almoſt be as great as if it were natural; that which men take in by education being next to that which is natural. And if it could be extinguiſhed, yet the advantage of it will not recompenſe the trouble of the cure: for, except the avoiding of perſecution for religion, there is no advantage that the principles of Atheiſm, if they could be quietly ſettled in a man's mind, can give him. The advantage indeed that men make of them is, to give themſelves the liberty to do what they pleaſe; to be more ſenſual and more unjuſt than other men; that is, they have the privilege to ſurfeit themſelves and to be ſick oftener than other men, and to make mankind their enemy, by their unjuſt and diſhoneſt actions; and, conſequently, to live more uneaſily in the world than other men.

So that the principles of religion, the belief of a God, and another life, by obliging men to be virtuous, do really promote their temporal happineſs. And all the privilege that Atheiſm pretends to, is, to let men looſe to vice; which is naturally attended with temporal inconveniencies. And if this be true, then the Atheiſt cannot pretend this reaſon of charity to mankind, which is the only one I can think of, to diſpute againſt religion, much leſs to rally upon it. For it is plain, that it would be no kindneſs to any man to be undeceived in theſe principles of religion, ſuppoſing they were falſe; becauſe the principles of religion are ſo far from hindering, that

they promote a man's happineſs even in this world: and as to the other world, there can be no inconvenience in the miſtake; for when a man is not, it will be no trouble to him that he was once deceived about theſe matters.

And where no obligation of conſcience nor of reaſon can be pretended, there certainly the laws of civility ought to take place. Now, men do profeſs to believe that there is a God, and that the common principles of religion are true, and to have a great veneration for theſe things: can there then be a greater inſolence, than for a man, when he comes into company, to rally and fall foul upon thoſe things for which he knows the company have a reverence? Can one man offer a greater affront to another, than to expoſe to ſcorn him whom he owns and declares to be his beſt friend, the patron of his life, and the greateſt benefactor he hath in the world? and doth not every man that owns a God ſay this of him?

But when the generality of mankind are of the ſame opinion, the rudeneſs is ſtill the greater. So that, whoever doth openly contemn God and religion, does *delinquere in majeſtatem populi, & humani generis*: "He does "offend againſt the majeſty of the people, and that reve- "rence which is due to the common apprehenſions of "mankind, whether they be true or not;" which is the greateſt incivility that can be imagined.

This is the firſt conſideration, and it is the leaſt that I have to urge in this matter: but yet I have inſiſted the longer upon it; becauſe it is ſuch a one as ought eſpecially to prevail upon thoſe who, I am afraid, are too often guilty of this vice; I mean thoſe who are of better breeding, becauſe they pretend to underſtand the laws of behaviour, and the decencies of converſation, better than other men.

2dly, Suppoſing it were doubtful, whether there be a God or not, and whether the principles of religion were true or not, and that the arguments were equal on both ſides; yet it would be a great folly to deride theſe things. And here I ſuppoſe as much as the Atheiſt can, with any colour of reaſon, pretend to. For no man ever yet pretended to demonſtrate, that there is no God, nor no life after

after this: for theſe being pure negatives, are capable of no proof, unleſs a man could ſhew them to be plainly impoſſible. The utmoſt that is pretended is, that the arguments that are brought for theſe things are not ſufficient to convince. But if they were only probable, ſo long as no arguments are produced to the contrary, that cannot in reaſon be denied to be a great advantage.

But I will, for the preſent, ſuppoſe the probabilities equal on both ſides. And upon this ſuppoſition I doubt not to make it appear to be a monſtrous folly, to deride theſe things; becauſe, though the arguments on both ſides were equal, yet the danger and hazard is infinitely unequal.

If it prove true, that there is no God, the religious man may be as happy in this world as the Atheiſt: nay, the principles of religion and virtue do in their own nature tend to make him happier; becauſe they give ſatisfaction to his mind, and his conſcience by this means is freed from many fearful girds and twinges which the Atheiſt feels. Beſides that the practice of religion and virtue doth naturally promote our temporal felicity. It is more for a man's health, and more for his reputation, and more for his advantage in all other worldly reſpects, to lead a virtuous, than a vitious courſe of life: and for the other world, if there be no God, the caſe of the religious man and the Atheiſt will be alike; becauſe they will both be extinguiſhed by death, and inſenſible of any farther happineſs or miſery.

But then, if the contrary opinion ſhould prove true, that there is a God, and that the ſouls of men are tranſmitted out of this world into the other, there to receive the juſt reward of their actions; then it is plain to every man, at firſt ſight, that the caſe of the religious man and the Atheiſt muſt be vaſtly different: then, *where ſhall the wicked and the ungodly appear?* and what think we ſhall be the portion of thoſe who have affronted God, and derided his word, and made a mock of every thing that is ſacred and religious? what can they expect, but to be rejected by him whom they have renounced, and to feel the terrible effects of that power and juſtice which they have deſpiſed? So that though the arguments on both ſides were equal, yet the danger is not ſo. One the one

ſide there is none at all, but it is infinite on the other. And, conſequently, it muſt be a monſtrous folly for any man to make a mock of thoſe things which he knows not whether they be or not; and if they be, of all things in the world they are no jeſting matters.

3*dly*, Suppoſe there be a God, and that the principles of religion are true, then is it not only a heinous impiety, but a perfect madneſs, to ſcoff at theſe things. And that there is a God, and that the principles of religion are true, I have already, in my former diſcourſe, endeavoured to prove, both from the things which are made, and from the general conſent of mankind in theſe principles; of which univerſal conſent, no ſufficient reaſon can be given, unleſs they were true: and ſuppoſing they are ſo, it is not only the utmoſt pitch of impiety, but the higheſt flight of folly that can be imagined, to deride theſe things. To be diſobedient to the commands of God, is a great contempt; but to deny his being, and to make ſport with his word, and to endeavour to render it ridiculous, by turning the wiſe and weighty ſayings of that holy book into raillery, is a moſt direct affront to the God that is above. Thus the Pſalmiſt deſcribes theſe Atheiſtical perſons, as levelling their blaſphemies immediately againſt the majeſty of heaven: *They ſet their mouth againſt the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth*; they do miſchief among men, but the affront is immediately to God.

Beſides that this profane ſpirit is an argument of a moſt incorrigible temper. The wiſe man every where ſpeaks of the ſcorner as one of the worſt ſort of ſinners, and hardeſt to be reclaimed; becauſe he deſpiſeth inſtruction, and mocks at all the means whereby he ſhould be reformed.

And then, is it not a moſt black and horrid ingratitude, thus to uſe the author of our beings, and the patron of our lives; to make a ſcorn of him that made us; and to live in an open defiance of him, *in whom we live, move, and have our beings?* But this is not all. As it is a moſt heinous, ſo it is a moſt dangerous impiety, to deſpiſe him that can deſtroy us, and to oppoſe him who is infinitely more powerful than we are. *Will ye* (ſays the Apoſtle) *provoke the Lord to jealouſy? are ye ſtronger*

ſtronger than he? What Gamaliel ſaid to the Jews, in another caſe, may with a little change be applied to this ſort of men: If there be a God, and the principles of religion be true, *ye cannot overthrow them: therefore refrain from ſpeaking againſt theſe* things, *leſt ye be found fighters againſt God.*

I will but add one thing more, to ſhew the folly of this profane temper; and that is this: That as it is the greateſt of all other ſins, ſo there is in truth the leaſt temptation to it. When the devil tempts men with riches or honour to ruin themſelves, he offers them ſome kind of conſideration: but the profane perſon ſerves the devil for nought, and ſins only for ſin's ſake; ſuffers himſelf to be tempted to the greateſt ſins, and into the greateſt dangers, for no other reward, but the ſlender reputation of ſeeming to ſay that wittily which no wiſe man would ſay. And what a folly is this, for a man to offend his conſcience, to pleaſe his humour; and, only for his jeſt, to loſe two of the beſt friends he hath in the world, God, and his own ſoul?

I have done with the three things I propounded to ſpeak to upon this argument. And now I beg your patience, to apply what I have ſaid to theſe three purpoſes.

1. To take men off from this impious and dangerous folly of profaneneſs, which by ſome is miſcalled wit.

2. To caution men, not to think the worſe of religion, becauſe ſome are ſo bold as to deſpiſe and deride it.

3. To perſuade men to employ that reaſon and wit which God hath given them, to better and nobler purpoſes, in the ſervice and to the glory of that God who hath beſtowed theſe gifts on men.

1ſt, To take men off from this impious and dangerous folly. I know not how it comes to paſs that ſome men have the fortune to be eſteemed wits, only for jeſting out of the common road, and for making bold to ſcoff at thoſe things which the greateſt part of mankind reverence: as if a man ſhould be accounted a wit, for reviling thoſe in authority; which is no more an argument of any man's wit, than it is of his diſcretion. A wiſe man would not ſpeak contemptuouſly of a great prince, though he were out of his dominions; becauſe he remembers that Kings have long hands, and that their

power and influence does many times reach a great way farther than their direct authority. But *God is a great king, and in his hands are all the corners of the earth; we can go no whither from his ſpirit, nor can we flee from his preſence:* where-ever we are, *his eye ſees us*, and *his right hand can* reach us. If men did truly conſult the intereſt either of their ſafety or reputation, they would never exerciſe their wit in dangerous matters. Wit is a very commendable quality; but then a wiſe man ſhould always have the keeping of it. It is a ſharp weapon, as apt for miſchief as for good purpoſes, if it be not well managed. The proper uſe of it is, to ſeaſon converſation; to repreſent what is praiſe-worthy to the greateſt advantage, and to expoſe the vices and follies of men, ſuch things as are in themſelves truly ridiculous: but if it be applied to the abuſe of the graveſt and moſt ſerious matters, it then loſes its commendation. If any man think he abounds in this quality, and hath wit to ſpare, there is ſcope enough for it within the bounds of religion and decency; and when it tranſgreſſeth theſe, it degenerates into inſolence and impiety. All wit which borders upon profaneneſs, and makes bold with thoſe things to which the greateſt reverence is due, deſerves to be branded for folly.

And if we would preſerve ourſelves from the infection of this vice, we muſt take heed how we ſcoff at religion, under any form, leſt inſenſibly we derive ſome contempt upon religion itſelf. And we muſt likewiſe take heed how we accuſtom ourſelves to a ſlight and irreverent uſe of the name of God, and of the phraſes and expreſſions of the holy Bible, which ought not to be applied upon every light occaſion. Men will eaſily ſlide into the higheſt degree of profaneneſs who are not careful to preſerve a due reverence for the great and glorious name of God, and an awful regard to the holy ſcriptures. None ſo nearly diſpoſed to ſcoffing at religion, as thoſe who have accuſtomed themſelves to ſwear upon trifling occaſions. For it is juſt with God, to permit thoſe who allow themſelves in one degree of profaneneſs, to proceed to another, till at laſt they come to that height of impiety, as to contemn all religion.

2*dly*, Let no man think the worſe of religion, becauſe ſome

ſome are ſo bold as to deſpiſe and deride it: for it is no diſparagement to any perſon or thing to be laughed at, but to deſerve to be ſo. The moſt grave and ſerious matters in the whole world are liable to be abuſed. It is a known ſaying of Epictetus, "That every thing hath two handles:" by which he means, that there is nothing ſo bad, but a man may lay hold of ſomething or other about it that will afford matter of excuſe and extenuation; nor nothing ſo excellent, but a man may faſten upon ſomething or other belonging to it whereby to traduce it. A ſharp wit may find ſomething in the wiſeſt man whereby to expoſe him to the contempt of injudicious people. The graveſt book that ever was written may be made ridiculous, by applying the ſayings of it to a fooliſh purpoſe; for a jeſt may be obtruded upon any thing. And therefore no man ought to have the leſs reverence for the principles of religion, or for the holy ſcriptures, becauſe idle and profane wits can break jeſts upon them. Nothing is ſo eaſy as to take particular phraſes and expreſſions out of the beſt book in the world, and to abuſe them, by forcing an odd and ridiculous ſenſe upon them. But no wiſe man will think a good book fooliſh for this reaſon, but the man that abuſes it; nor will he eſteem that to which every thing is liable, to be a juſt exception againſt any thing. At this rate we muſt deſpiſe all things: but ſurely the better and the ſhorter way is, to contemn thoſe who would bring any thing that is worthy into contempt.

3*dly*, and laſtly, To perſuade men to employ that reaſon and wit which God hath given them, to better and nobler purpoſes, in the ſervice and to the glory of that God who hath beſtowed theſe gifts on men; as Aholiab and Bezaleel did their mechanical ſkill in the adorning and beautifying of God's tabernacle. For this is the perfection of every thing, to attain its true and proper end; and the end of all thoſe gifts and endowments which God hath given us, is, to glorify the giver.

Here is ſubject enough to exerciſe the wit of men and angels: to praiſe that infinite goodneſs, and almighty power, and exquiſite wiſdom, which made us and all things; and to admire what we can never ſufficiently praiſe: to vindicate the wiſe and juſt providence of God,

God, in the government of the world; and to endeavour, as well as we can upon an imperfect view of things, to make out the beauty and harmony of all: the ſeeming diſcords and irregularities of the divine adminiſtrations: to explain the oracles of the holy ſcriptures; and to adore that great myſtery of divine love, which the angels, better and nobler creatures than we are, deſire to pry into, God's ſending his only Son into the world to ſave ſinners, and to give his life a ranſom for them. Theſe would be noble exerciſes indeed for the tongues and pens of the greateſt wits. And ſubjects of this nature are the beſt trials of our ability in this kind. Satire and invective are the eaſieſt kind of wit; almoſt any degree of it will ſerve to abuſe and find fault: for wit is a keen inſtrument, and every one can cut and gaſh with it; but to carve a beautiful image, and to poliſh it, requires great art and dexterity. To praiſe any thing well, is an argument of much more wit than to abuſe. A little wit, and a great deal of ill nature, will furniſh a man for ſatire; but the greateſt inſtance of wit is, to commend well. And perhaps the beſt things are the hardeſt to be duly commended: for though there be a great deal of matter to work upon, yet there is great judgment required to make choice; and where the ſubject is great and excellent, it is hard not to ſink below the dignity of it.

This I ſay on purpoſe to recommend to men a nobler exerciſe for their wits, and, if it be poſſible, to put them out of conceit with that ſcoffing humour which is ſo eaſy and ſo ill-natured, and is not only an enemy to religion, but to every thing elſe that is wiſe and worthy. And I am very much miſtaken, if the ſtate as well as the church, the civil government as well as religion, do not in a ſhort ſpace find the intolerable inconvenience of this humour.

But I confine myſelf to the conſideration of religion. And it is ſad indeed, that in a nation profeſſing Chriſtianity ſo horrid an impiety ſhould dare to appear. But the ſcripture hath foretold us, that this ſort of men ſhould ariſe in the goſpel-age; and they did appear even in the Apoſtles days. That which is more ſad and ſtrange is, that we ſhould perſiſt in this profaneneſs, notwithſtanding the terrible judgments of God which have been abroad

abroad in this nation. God hath of late years manifeſted himſelf in a very dreadful manner, as if it were on purpoſe to give a check to this inſolent impiety: and now that thoſe judgments have done no good upon us, we may juſtly fear that he will appear once for all. And it is time for him to ſhew himſelf when his very being is called in queſtion, and to come and judge the world when men begin to doubt whether he made it.

The ſcripture mentions two things as the forerunners and reaſons of his coming to judgment; infidelity, and profane ſcoffing at religion: *When the Son of man comes, ſhall he find faith on the earth?* Luke xviii. 8. And St. Jude, out of an ancient prophecy of Enoch, expreſsly mentions this as one reaſon of the coming of the Lord, *To convince ungodly ſinners of all their hard ſpeeches which they had ſpoken againſt him*, Jude, ℣ 15.

And if theſe things be a ſign and reaſon of his coming, I wiſh that we in this age had not too much cauſe to apprehend *the judge to be at the door.* This impiety did forerun the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the utter ruin of the Jewiſh nation; and if it hold on amongſt us, may not we have reaſon to fear, that either *the end of all things is at hand*, or that ſome very diſmal calamity, greater than any our eyes have yet ſeen, does hang over us? But I would fain hope that God hath mercy ſtill for us, and that men will pity themſelves, and *repent, and give glory to God*; and *know in this their day the things that belong to their peace.* Which God of his infinite mercy grant for the ſake of Chriſt. To whom, with the Father, &c.

SERMON

SERMON III.

The advantages of religion to ſocieties.

PROV. xiv. 34.

Righteouſneſs exalteth a nation; but ſin is the reproach of any people.

ONE of the firſt principles that is planted in the nature of man, and which lies at the very root and foundation of his being, is, the deſire of his own preſervation and happineſs. Hence it is, that every man is led by intereſt, and does love or hate, chuſe or refuſe things, according as he apprehends them to conduce to this end, or to contradict it. And becauſe the happineſs of this life is moſt preſent and ſenſible, therefore human nature, which in this degenerate ſtate is extremely ſunk down into ſenſe, is moſt powerfully affected with ſenſible and temporal things: and, conſequently, there cannot be a greater prejudice raiſed againſt any thing, than to have it repreſented as inconvenient and hurtful to our temporal intereſts.

Upon this account it is that religion hath extremely ſuffered in the opinion of many, as if it were oppoſite to our preſent welfare, and did rob men of the greateſt advantages and conveniencies of life. So that he that would do right to religion, and make a ready way for the entertainment of it among men, cannot take a more effectual courſe, than by reconciling it with the happineſs of mankind; and by giving ſatisfaction to our reaſon, that it is ſo far from being an enemy, that it is the greateſt friend to our temporal intereſts; and that it doth not only tend to make every man happy conſidered ſingly and in a private capacity, but is excellently fitted for the benefit of human ſociety.

How much religion tends even to the temporal advantage of private perſons, I ſhall not now conſider, becauſe my text leads me to diſcourſe of the other, namely,

ly, to shew how advantageous religion and virtue are to the publick prosperity of a nation; which I take to be the meaning of this aphorism of Solomon, *Righteousness exalteth a nation*, &c.

And here I shall not restrain righteousness to the particular virtue of justice, though in this sense also this saying is most true, but enlarge it according to the genius and strain of the book of the Proverbs; in which the words *wisdom* and *righteousness* are commonly used very comprehensively, so as to signify all religion and virtue. And that this word is so to be taken in the text, may appear farther from the opposition of it to sin or vice in general: *Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is the reproach of any people.*

You see then what will be the subject of my present discourse, namely, That religion and virtue are the great causes of publick happiness and prosperity.

And though the truth of this hath been universally acknowledged, and long enough experienced in the world; yet, because the fashion of the age is to call every thing into question, it will be requisite to satisfy mens reason about it. To which end I shall do these two things:

1. Endeavour to give an account of this truth.

2. To vindicate it from the pretences and insinuations of Atheistical persons.

I. I shall give you this twofold account of it.

1. From the justice of the divine providence.

2. From the natural tendency of the thing.

1*st*, From the justice of the divine providence. Indeed, as to particular persons, the providences of God are many times promiscuously administered in this world; so that no man can certainly conclude God's love or hatred to any person by any thing that befals him in this life. But God does not deal thus with nations; because publick bodies and communities of men, as such, can only be rewarded and punished in this world. For, in the next, all those publick societies and combinations wherein men are now linked together under several governments, shall be dissolved. God will not then reward or punish nations, as nations; but every man shall then give an account of himself to God, and receive his own reward, and bear his own burthen. For although God

God account it no diſparagement to his juſtice to let particular good men ſuffer in this world, and paſs *through many tribulations into the kingdom of God;* becauſe there is another day a-coming which will be a more proper ſeaſon of reward: yet, in the uſual courſe of his providence, he recompenſeth religious and virtuous nations with temporal bleſſings and proſperity. For which reaſon St. Auſtin tells us, that the mighty ſucceſs and long proſperity of the Romans was a reward given them by God for their eminent juſtice and temperance, and other virtues. And, on the other hand, God many times ſuffers the moſt grievous ſins of particular perſons to go unpuniſhed in this world, becauſe he knows that his juſtice will have another and better opportunity to meet and reckon with them. But the general and crying ſins of a nation cannot hope to eſcape publick judgments, unleſs they be prevented by a general repentance. God may defer his judgments for a time, and give a people a longer ſpace of repentance; he may ſtay till the iniquities of a nation be full; but ſooner or later they have reaſon to expect his vengeance. And uſually the longer puniſhment is delayed, it is the heavier when it comes.

Now, all this is very reaſonable, becauſe this world is the only ſeaſon for national puniſhments. And indeed they are in a great degree neceſſary for the preſent vindication of the honour and majeſty of the divine laws, and to give ſome check to the overflowing of wickedneſs. Publick judgments are the banks and ſhores upon which God breaks the inſolency of ſinners, and ſtays their proud waves. And though among men the multitude of offenders be many times a cauſe of impunity, becauſe of the weakneſs of human governments, which are glad to ſpare where they are not ſtrong enough to puniſh; yet in the government of God things are quite otherwiſe. No combination of ſinners is too hard for him; and the greater and more numerous the offenders are, the more his juſtice is concerned to vindicate the affront. However God may paſs by ſingle ſinners in this world, yet when a nation combines againſt him, *when hand joins in hand, the wicked ſhall not go unpuniſhed.*

This the ſcripture declares to be the ſettled courſe of God's providence, that a righteous nation ſhall be happy:

py: *The work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace; and the effects of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.* And, on the other hand, that he uſeth to ſhower down his judgments upon a wicked people: *He turneth a fruitful land into barrenneſs, for the wickedneſs of them that dwell therein.*

And the experience of all ages hath made this good. All along the hiſtory of the Old Teſtament, we find the interchangeable providences of God towards the people of Iſrael always ſuited to their manners. They were conſtantly proſperous or afflicted according as piety and virtue flouriſhed or declined amongſt them. And God did not only exerciſe this providence towards his own people, but he dealt thus alſo with other nations. The Roman empire, whilſt the virtue of that people remained firm, was *ſtrong as iron*, as it is repreſented in the prophecy of Daniel: but, upon the diſſolution of their manners, the iron began *to be mixed with* miry *clay*, and the feet upon which that empire ſtood to *be broken*. And though God, in the adminiſtration of his juſtice, be not tied to precedents, and we cannot argue from ſcripture-examples that the providences of God towards other nations ſhall in all circumſtances be conformable to his dealings with the people of Iſrael; yet thus much may with great probability be collected from them, that as God always bleſſed that people while they were obedient to him, and followed them with his judgments when they rebelled againſt him, ſo he will alſo deal with other nations: becauſe the reaſon of thoſe diſpenſations, as to the main and ſubſtance of them, ſeems to be perpetual, and founded in that which can never change, the juſtice of the divine providence.

2*dly*, The truth of this farther appears from the natural tendency of the thing. For religion in general, and every particular virtue, doth in its own nature conduce to the publick intereſt.

Religion, where-ever it is truly planted, is certainly the greateſt obligation upon conſcience to all civil offices and moral duties. Chaſtity, and temperance, and induſtry, do in their own nature tend to health and plenty. Truth and fidelity in all our dealings do create mutual love and good-will, and confidence among men; which

are the great bands of peace. And, on the contrary, wickedneſs doth in its own nature produce many publick miſchiefs. For as ſins are linked together, and draw on one another; ſo almoſt every vice hath ſome temporal inconvenience annexed to it, and naturally following it. Intemperance and luſt breed infirmities and diſeaſes; which, being propagated, ſpoil the ſtrain of a nation. Idleneſs and luxury bring forth poverty and want; and this tempts men to injuſtice, and that cauſeth enmity and animoſities, and theſe bring on *ſtrife and confuſion, and every evil work.* This philoſophical account of publick troubles and confuſions St. James gives us: *Whence come wars and fightings among you? are they not hence, even from your luſts, that war in your members?* Jam. iv. 1.

But I ſhall ſhew more particularly, that religion and virtue do naturally tend to the good order and more eaſy government of human ſociety; becauſe they have a good influence both upon magiſtrates and ſubjects.

1. Upon magiſtrates. Religion teacheth them to rule over men in the fear of God; becauſe though they be gods on earth, yet they are ſubjects of heaven, and accountable to him who is higher than the higheſt in this world. Religion in a magiſtrate ſtrengthens his authority; becauſe it procures veneration and gains a reputation to it. And in all the affairs of this world, ſo much reputation is really ſo much power. We ſee, that piety and virtue, where they are found among men of lower degree, will command ſome reverence and reſpect: but in perſons of eminent place and dignity, they are ſeated to a great advantage, ſo as to caſt a luſtre upon their very place, and by a ſtrong reflexion to double the beams of majeſty. Whereas impiety and vice do ſtrangely leſſen greatneſs, and do ſecretly and unavoidably derive ſome weakneſs upon authority itſelf. Of this the ſcripture gives us a remarkable inſtance in David. For, among other things which made *the ſons of Zeruiah too hard for him*, this probably was none of the leaſt, that they were particularly conſcious to his crimes.

2. Religion hath a good influence upon the people, to make them obedient to government, and peaceable one towards another.

1*ſt*, To make them obedient to government, and conformable

formable to laws: and that *not only for wrath*, and out of fear of the magistrate's power; which is but a weak and loose principle of obedience, and will cease, whenever men can rebel with safety, and to advantage; but out *of conscience*; which is a firm, and constant, and lasting principle, and will hold a man fast when all other obligations will break. He that hath entertained the true principles of Christianity, is not to be tempted from his obedience and subjection by any worldly considerations; because he believes, that *whosoever resisteth authority, resisteth the ordinance of God*; and that *they who resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.*

2*dly*, Religion tends to make men peaceable one towards another. For it endeavours to plant all those qualities and dispositions in men which tend to peace and unity, and to fill men with a spirit of universal love and good-will. It endeavours likewise to secure every man's interest, by commanding the observation of that great rule of equity, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*; by injoining that truth and fidelity be inviolably observed in all our words, promises and contracts. And, in order hereunto, it requires the extirpation of all those passions and vices which render men unsociable and troublesome to one another; as pride, covetousness and injustice, hatred, and revenge and cruelty; and those likewise which are not so commonly reputed vices, as self-conceit, and peremptoriness in a man's own opinion, and all peevishness and incompliance of humour in things lawful and indifferent.

And that these are the proper effects of true piety, the doctrine of our Saviour and his Apostles every where teacheth us. Now, if this be the design of religion, to bring us to this temper, thus to heal the natures of men, and to sweeten their spirits; to correct their passions, and to mortify all those lusts which are the causes of enmity and division: then it is evident, that in its own nature it tends to the peace and happiness of human society; and that, if men would but live as religion requires they should do, the world would be a quiet habitation, a most lovely and desirable place in comparison of what now it is. And, indeed, the true reason why the societies of

men are ſo full of tumult and diſorder, ſo troubleſome and tempeſtuous, is, becauſe there is ſo little of true religion among men: ſo that, were it not for ſome ſmall remainders of piety and virtue which are yet left ſcattered among mankind, human ſociety would in a ſhort ſpace diſband, and run into confuſion; the earth would grow wild, and become a great foreſt; and mankind would become beaſts of prey one towards another. And if this diſcourſe hold true, ſurely then one would think, that virtue ſhould find itſelf a ſeat where-ever human ſocieties are, and that religion ſhould be owned and encouraged in the world, until men ceaſe to be governed by reaſon.

II. I come to vindicate this truth from the inſinuations and pretences of Atheiſtical perſons. I ſhall mention two.

1. That government may ſubſiſt well enough without the belief of a God, and a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments after this life.

2. That as for virtue and vice, they are arbitrary things.

1*ſt*, That government may ſubſiſt well enough without the belief of a God, or a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments after this life. And this the Atheiſt does and muſt aſſert, otherwiſe he is by his own confeſſion a declared enemy to government, and unfit to live in human ſociety.

For anſwer to this, I will not deny, but that though the generality of men did not believe any ſuperior being, nor any rewards and puniſhments after this life; yet, notwithſtanding this, there might be ſome kind of government kept up in the world. For ſuppoſing men to have reaſon, the neceſſities of human nature, and the miſchiefs of confuſion, would probably compel them into ſome kind of order. But then I ſay withal, that if theſe principles were baniſhed out of the world, government would be far more difficult than now it is; becauſe it would want its firmeſt baſis and foundation. There would be infinitely more diſorders in the world, if men were reſtrained from injuſtice and violence only by human laws, and not by principles of conſcience, and the

dread

dread of another world. Therefore magiſtrates have always thought themſelves concerned to cheriſh religion, and to maintain in the minds of men the belief of a God and another life. Nay, that common ſuggeſtion of Atheiſtical perſons, that religion was at firſt a politick device, and is ſtill kept up in the world as a ſtate-engine to awe men into obedience, is a clear acknowledgment of the uſefulneſs of it to the ends of government; and does as fully contradict that pretence of theirs, which I am now confuting, as any thing that can be ſaid.

2*dly*, That virtue and vice are arbitrary things, founded only in the imaginations of men, and in the conſtitutions and cuſtoms of the world, but not in the nature of the things themſelves; and that that is virtue or vice, good or evil, which the ſupreme authority of a nation declares to be ſo. And this is frequently and confidently aſſerted by the ingenious author of a very bad book, I mean the *Leviathan*.

Now, the proper way of anſwering any thing that is confidently aſſerted, is to ſhew the contrary, namely, That there are ſome things that have a natural evil and deformity in them, as perjury, perfidiouſneſs, unrighteouſneſs, and ingratitude; which are things not only condemned by the poſitive laws and conſtitutions of particular nations and governments, but by the general verdict of human nature: and that the virtues contrary to theſe have a natural goodneſs and comelineſs in them, and are ſuitable to the common principles and ſentiments of humanity.

And this will moſt evidently appear, by putting this ſuppoſition. Suppoſe the reverſe of all that which we now call virtue were ſolemnly enacted, and the practice of fraud, and rapine, and perjury, and falſeneſs to a man's word, and all manner of vice and wickedneſs were eſtabliſhed by a law; I aſk now, if the caſe between virtue and vice were thus altered, would that which we now call vice in proceſs of time gain the reputation of virtue, and that which we now call virtue grow odious and contemptible to human nature? If it would not, then is there ſomething in the nature of good and evil, of virtue and vice, which does not depend upon the pleaſure of authority, nor is ſubject to any arbitrary conſti-

tution. But that it would not be thus, I am very certain; becauſe no government could ſubſiſt upon theſe terms. For the very injoining of fraud and rapine, and perjury and breach of truſt, doth apparently deſtroy the greateſt end of government; which is, to preſerve men in their rights, againſt the incroachments of fraud and violence. And this end being deſtroyed, human ſocieties would preſently fly in pieces, and men would neceſſarily fall into a ſtate of war. Which plainly ſhews, that virtue and vice are not arbitrary things, but that there is a natural, and immutable, and eternal reaſon for that which we call goodneſs and virtue, and againſt that which we call vice and wickedneſs.

Thus I have endeavoured to evidence and vindicate this truth. I ſhall only draw an inference or two from this diſcourſe, and ſo conclude.

1. If this diſcourſe be true, then thoſe who are in place of power and authority are peculiarly concerned to maintain the honour of religion.

2. It concerns every one to live in the practice of it.

1*ſt*, Magiſtrates are concerned to maintain the honour of religion, which doth not only tend to every man's future happineſs, but is the beſt inſtrument of civil government, and of the temporal proſperity of a nation. For the whole deſign of it is, to procure the private and publick happineſs of mankind, and to reſtrain men from all thoſe things which would make them miſerable and guilty to themſelves, unpeaceable and troubleſome to the world. Religion hath ſo great an influence upon the felicity of men, that it ought to be upheld, and the veneration of it maintained, not only out of a juſt dread of the divine vengeance in another world, but out of regard to the temporal peace and proſperity of men. It will requite all the kindneſs and honour we can do it, by the advantages it will bring to civil government, and by the bleſſings it will draw down upon it. God hath promiſed, *that thoſe that honour him, he will honour*; and in the common courſe of his providence he uſually makes this good: ſo that the civil authority ought to be very tender of the honour of God and religion, if for no other reaſon, yet out of reaſon of ſtate.

It were to be wiſhed, that all men were ſo piouſly diſpoſed,

poſed, that religion, by its own authority, and the reaſonable force of it, might be ſufficient to eſtabliſh its empire in the minds of men. But the corruptions of men will always make a ſtrong oppoſition againſt it. And therefore, at the firſt planting of the Chriſtian religion in the world, God was pleaſed to accompany it with a miraculous power: but, after it was planted, this extraordinary power ceaſed; and God hath now left it to be maintained and ſupported by more ordinary and human ways, by the countenance of authority, and aſſiſtance of laws; which were never more neceſſary than in this degenerate age, which is prodigiouſly ſunk into Atheiſm and profaneneſs, and is running headlong into an humour of ſcoffing at God and religion, and every thing that is ſacred. For ſome ages before the reformation, Atheiſm was confined to Italy, and had its chief reſidence at Rome. All the mention that is of it in the hiſtory of thoſe times, the Papiſts themſelves give us in the lives of their own Popes and Cardinals, excepting two or three ſmall philoſophers that were retainers to that court. So that this Atheiſtical humour among Chriſtians, was the ſpawn of the groſs ſuperſtitions and corrupt manners of the Romiſh church and court. And indeed nothing is more natural, than for extremes in religion to beget one another, like the vibrations of a pendulum, which the more violently you ſwing it one way, the farther it will return the other. But, in the laſt age, Atheiſm travelled over the Alps, and infected France; and now of late, it hath croſſed the ſeas, and invaded our nation, and hath prevailed to amazement: for I do not think that there are any people in the world that are generally more indiſpoſed to it, and can worſe brook it; ſeriouſneſs and zeal in religion being almoſt the natural temper of the Engliſh. So that nothing is to me matter of greater wonder, than that in a grave and ſober nation profaneneſs ſhould ever come to gain ſo much ground, and the beſt and the wiſeſt religion in the world to be made the ſcorn of fools. For, beſides the profane and Atheiſtical diſcourſes about God and religion, and the bold and ſenſeleſs abuſes of his ſacred book, the great inſtrument of our ſalvation, which are ſo frequent in the publick places of reſort; I ſay, beſides theſe, I ſpeak it knowingly,

knowingly, a man can hardly pass the streets without having his ears grated and pierced with such horrid and blasphemous oaths and curses, as are enough, if we were guilty of no other sin, to sink a nation. And this not only from the tribe that wear liveries, but from those that go before them, and should give better example. Is it not then high time that the laws should provide, by the most prudent and effectual means, to curb these bold and insolent defiers of heaven, who take a pride in being monsters, and boast themselves in the follies and deformities of human nature? The Heathens would never suffer their gods to be reviled, which yet were no gods: and shall it, among the professors of the true religion, be allowed to any man to make a mock of him that made heaven and earth, and to breathe out blasphemies against him who gives us life, and breath, and all things? I doubt not but hypocrisy is a great wickedness, and very odious to God; but by no means of so pernicious example as open profaneness. Hypocrisy is a more modest way of sinning; it shews some reverence to religion, and does so far own the worth and excellency of it, as to acknowledge that it deserves to be counterfeited: whereas profaneness declares openly against it, and endeavours to make a party to drive it out of the world.

2*dly*, It concerns every one to live in the practice of religion and virtue; because the publick happiness and prosperity depends upon it. It is most apparent that of late years religion is very sensibly declined among us. The manners of men have almost been universally corrupted by a civil war. We should therefore all jointly endeavour to retrieve the ancient virtue of the nation, and to bring into fashion again that solid and substantial, that plain and unaffected piety, free from the extremes both of superstition and enthusiasm, which flourished in the age of our immediate forefathers: which did not consist in idle talk, but in real effects; in a sincere love of God and of our neighbour, in a pious devotion and reverence towards the divine Majesty, and in the virtuous actions of a good life; in the denial of *ungodliness and worldly lusts, and in living soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world.* This were the true way to reconcile

concile God to us, to ſtop the courſe of his judgments, and to bring down the bleſſings of heaven upon us. God hath now been pleaſed to ſettle us again in peace both at home and abroad, and he hath put us once more into the hands of our own counſel. Life and death, bleſſing and curſing, proſperity and deſtruction, are before us. We may chuſe our own fortune; and, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, we may, under the influences of God's grace and aſſiſtance, which are never wanting to our ſincere endeavours, become a happy and a proſperous people.

The good God make us all wiſe to know and to do the things that belong to the temporal peace and proſperity of the nation, and to the eternal happineſs and ſalvation of every one of our ſouls. Which we humbly beg for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt. To whom, *&c.*

SERMON IV.

The advantages of religion to particular perſons.

PSAL. XIX. 11.

And in keeping of them there is great reward.

IN this pſalm David celebrates the glory of God from the conſideration of the greatneſs of his works, and the perfection of his laws. From the greatneſs of his works, ℣ 1. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament ſheweth his handy-work*, &c. From the perfection of his laws, ℣ 7. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the ſoul*, &c. And among many other excellencies of the divine laws, he mentions, in the laſt place, the benefits and advantages which come from the obſervance of them, ℣ 11. *And in keeping of them there is great reward.*

I have already ſhewn how much religion tends to the publick welfare of mankind; to the ſupport of government,

ment, and to the peace and happineſs of human ſocieties. My work at this time ſhall be, to ſhew that religion, and obedience to the laws of God, do likewiſe conduce to the happineſs of particular perſons, both in reſpect of this world and the other. For though there be but little expreſs mention made in the Old Teſtament of the immortality of the ſoul, and the rewards of another life; yet all religion does ſuppoſe theſe principles, and is built upon them.

And, *Firſt*, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew how religion conduceth to the happineſs of this life; and that both in reſpect of the inward and outward man.

I. As to the mind. To be pious and religious, brings a double advantage to the mind of man. 1. It tends to the improvement of our underſtandings. 2. It brings peace and pleaſure to our minds.

1ſt, It tends to the improvement of our underſtandings. I do not mean only that it inſtructs us in the knowledge of divine and ſpiritual things, and makes us to underſtand the great intereſt of our ſouls and the concernments of eternity better; but that, in general, it does raiſe and enlarge the minds of men, and make them more capable of true knowledge. And in this ſenſe I underſtand the following texts. *The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes*, Pſal. xix. 8. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom: a good underſtanding have all they that keep his commandments*, Pſal. cxi. 10. *Thou, through thy commandments, haſt made me wiſer than mine enemies*; which plainly refers to political prudence. *I have more underſtanding than all my teachers: for thy teſtimonies are my meditation*, Pſal. cxix. 98. 99. *I underſtand more than the ancients; becauſe I keep thy precepts*, ℣ 100. *Through thy precepts I get underſtanding*, ℣ 104. *The entrance of thy word giveth light: it giveth underſtanding to the ſimple*, ℣ 130.

Now, religion doth improve the underſtandings of men, by ſubduing their luſts, and moderating their paſſions. The luſts and paſſions of men do fully and darken their minds, even by a natural influence. Intemperance and ſenſuality, and fleſhly luſts, do debaſe mens minds, and clog their ſpirits; make them groſs and foul, liftleſs and unactive; they ſink us down into ſenſe, and

glew

glew us to theſe low and inferior things like birdlime; they hamper and intangle our ſouls, and hinder their flight upwards; they indiſpoſe and unfit our minds for the moſt noble and intellectual conſiderations. So likewiſe, the exorbitant paſſions of wrath and malice, envy and revenge, do darken and diſtort the underſtandings of men, do tincture the mind with falſe colours, and fill it with prejudice and undue apprehenſions of things.

There is no man that is intemperate, or luſtful, or paſſionate, but beſides the gullt he contracts, which is continually fretting and diſquieting his mind; beſides the inconveniencies he brings upon himſelf as to his health, he does likewiſe ſtain and obſcure the brightneſs of his ſoul, and the clearneſs of his diſcerning faculty. Such perſons have not that free uſe of their reaſon that they might have; their underſtandings are not bright enough, nor their ſpirits pure and fine enough for the exerciſe of the higheſt and nobleſt acts of reaſon. What clearneſs is to the eye, that purity is to our mind and underſtanding; and as the clearneſs of the bodily eye doth diſpoſe it for a quicker ſight of material objects, ſo doth the purity of our minds, that is, freedom from luſt and paſſion, diſpoſe us for the cleareſt and moſt perfect acts of reaſon and underſtanding.

Now, religion doth purify our minds, and refine our ſpirits, by quenching the fire of luſt, and ſuppreſſing the fumes and vapours of it, and by ſcattering the clouds and miſts of paſſion. And the more any man's ſoul is cleanſed from the filth and dregs of ſenſual luſt, the more nimble and expedite it will be in its operations. The more any man conquers his paſſions, the more calm and ſedate his ſpirit is; and the greater equality he maintains in his temper, his apprehenſions of things will be the more clear and unprejudiced, and his judgment more firm and ſteddy. And this is the meaning of that ſaying of Solomon, *He that is ſlow to wrath, is of great underſtanding; but he that is haſty of ſpirit, exalteth folly. Ira furor brevis eſt:* "Anger is a ſhort fit of madneſs;" and he that is paſſionate and furious, deprives himſelf of his reaſon, ſpoils his underſtanding, and helps to make himſelf a fool: whereas he that conquers his

paſſions

paſſions and keeps them under, doth thereby preſerve and improve his underſtanding. Freedom from irregular paſſions doth not only ſignify that a man is wiſe, but really contributes to the making of him ſuch.

2*dly*, Religion tends to the eaſe and pleaſure, the peace and tranquillity of our minds; wherein happineſs chiefly conſiſts, and which all the wiſdom and philoſophy of the world did always aim at, as the utmoſt felicity of this life. And that this is the natural fruit of a religious and virtuous courſe of life, the ſcripture declares to us in theſe texts. *Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart*, Pſal. xcvii. 11. *Great peace have all they that love thy law, and nothing ſhall offend them*, Pſal. cxix. 165. *Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace*, Prov. iii. 17. *The fruit of righteouſneſs is peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for ever*, Iſ. xxxii. 17. The plain ſenſe of which texts is, that pleaſure and peace do naturally reſult from a holy and good life. When a man hath once engaged himſelf in a religious courſe, and is habituated to piety and holineſs, all the exerciſes of religion and devotion, all acts of goodneſs and virtue, are delightful to him. To honour and worſhip God, to pray to him and to praiſe him, to ſtudy his will, to meditate upon him and to love him; all theſe bring great pleaſure and peace along with them. What greater contentment and ſatisfaction can there be to the mind of man, when it is once purified and refined from the dregs of ſenſual pleaſures and delights, and raiſed to its true height and pitch, than to contemplate and admire the infinite excellencies and perfections of God; to adore his greatneſs, and to love his goodneſs? How can the thoughts of God be troubleſome to any one who lives ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in the world? No man that loves goodneſs and righteouſneſs, hath any reaſon to be afraid of God, or to be diſquieted with the thoughts of him. There is nothing in God that is terrible to a good man, but all the apprehenſions which we naturally have of him, ſpeak comfort and promiſe happineſs to ſuch a one. The conſideration of his attributes is ſo far from being a trouble to him, that it is his recreation and delight. It is for wicked men to dread God, and to endeavour to baniſh

baniſh the thoughts of him out of their minds; but a holy and virtuous man may have quiet and undiſturbed thoughts even of the juſtice of God, becauſe the terror of it doth not concern him.

Now, religion doth contribute to the peace and quiet of our minds theſe two ways. 1. By allaying thoſe paſſions which are apt to ruffle and diſcompoſe our ſpirits. Malice and hatred, wrath and revenge, are very fretting and vexatious, and apt to make our minds ſore and uneaſy; but he that can moderate theſe affections, will find a ſtrange eaſe and pleaſure in his own ſpirit. 2. By freeing us from the anxieties of guilt, and the fears of divine wrath and diſpleaſure; than which nothing is more ſtinging and tormenting, and renders the life of man more miſerable and unquiet. And what a ſpring of peace and joy muſt it needs be, to apprehend, upon good grounds, that God is reconciled to us, and become our friend; that all our ſins are perfectly forgiven, and ſhall never more be remembered againſt us! What inexpreſſible comfort does overflow the pious and devout ſoul, from the remembrance of a holy and well-ſpent life, and a conſcience of its own innocency and integrity! And nothing but the practice of religion and virtue can give this eaſe and ſatisfaction to the mind of man. For there is a certain kind of temper and diſpoſition which is neceſſary to the pleaſure and quiet of our minds, and conſequently to our happineſs; and that is, holineſs and goodneſs; which as it is the perfection, ſo is it likewiſe the happineſs of the divine nature. And, on the contrary, the chief part of the miſery of wicked men, and of thoſe accurſed ſpirits the devils, is this, that they are of a diſpoſition contrary to God; they are envious, and malicious, and cruel, and of ſuch a temper as is naturally a torment and diſquiet to itſelf. And here the foundation of hell is laid, in the evil diſpoſition of mens minds; and till this be cured, which can only be done by religion, it is as impoſſible for a man to be happy, that is, pleaſed and contented within himſelf, as it is for a ſick man to be at eaſe; becauſe ſuch a man hath that within him which torments him, and he cannot be at eaſe till that be removed. The man's ſpirit is out of order, and off the hinges; and till that be put into its right frame, he will be perpetually diſ-

quieted, and can find no reſt within himſelf. The Prophet very fitly deſcribes to us the unquiet condition of wicked men: *The wicked is like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt. There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked,* Iſ. lvii. 20. 21. So long as ſin and corruption abound in our hearts, they will be reſtleſsly working, like wine, which will be in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged itſelf of its dregs and foulneſs.

II. Religion does likewiſe tend to the happineſs of the outward man. Now, the bleſſings of this kind are ſuch as either reſpect our health, or eſtate, or reputation, or relations; and in reſpect of all theſe religion is highly advantageous to us.

1*ſt*, As to our health; a religious and virtuous life doth eminently conduce to that, and to long life as a conſequent of it. And in this ſenſe I underſtand theſe following texts. *My ſon, forget not my law; but let thy heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, ſhall they add to thee,* Prov. iii. 1. 2.; and ℣ 7. & 8. *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It ſhall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.* And ℣ 16. among the temporal advantages of wiſdom or religion, this is mentioned as the firſt and principal, *Length of days is in her right hand;* and ℣ 18. *She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her.* And again, *Whoſo findeth me, findeth life. But he that ſinneth againſt me, wrongeth his own ſoul;* that is, is injurious to his own life: *all they that hate me, love death,* Prov. viii. 35. 36. All which is undoubtedly true in a ſpiritual ſenſe, but is certainly meant by Solomon in the natural ſenſe. And theſe promiſes of the bleſſings of health and long life to good men, are not only declaratory of the good pleaſure and intention of God towards them, but likewiſe of the natural tendency of the thing. For religion doth oblige men to the practice of thoſe virtues which do in their own nature conduce to the preſervation of our health, and the lengthening of our days; ſuch as, temperance, and chaſtity, and moderation of our paſſions. And the contrary vices to theſe do apparently tend to the impairing of mens health, and the ſhortening of their days. How many have waſted and conſumed their bodies by luſt, and brought grievous

grievous pains and mortal diseases upon themselves! See how the wise man describes the sad consequences of this sin. *He goes as an ox to the slaughter, till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life*, Prov. vii. 22. 23.; and ℣ 25. 26. 27. *Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell*, (that is, to the grave), *going down to the chambers of death.* How many have been ruined by intemperance and excess, and most unnaturally have perverted those blessings which God hath given for the support of nature, to the overthrow and destruction of it? How often hath mens malice, and envy, and discontent against others, terminated in a cruel revenge upon themselves? How many, by the wild fury and extravagancy of their own passions, have put their bodies into a combustion, and fired their spirits; and, by stirring up their rage and choler against others, have armed that fierce humour against themselves?

2dly, As to our estates; religion is likewise a mighty advantage to men in that respect: not only in regard of God's more especial providence and peculiar blessing, which usually attends good men in their undertakings, and crowns them with good success; but also from the nature of the thing. And this, I doubt not, is the meaning of those expressions of the wise man concerning the temporal benefits and advantages of wisdom or religion. *In her left hand are riches and honour*, Prov. iii. 16. *They that love me, shall inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures*, Prov. viii. 21. And this religion principally does, by charging men with truth, and fidelity, and justice in their dealings; which are a sure way of thriving, and will hold out when all fraudulent arts and devices will fail. And this also Solomon observes to us: *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his way, shall be known*, Prov. x. 9; his indirect dealing will be discovered one time or other, and then he loses his reputation, and his interest sinks. Falshood and deceit only serve a present turn, and the consequence of them is pernicious; but truth and fidelity are a lasting advantage: *The righteous hath an everlasting*

foundation, Prov. x. 25. *The lip of truth is eſtabliſhed for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment*, Prov. xii. 19. And religion does likewiſe engage men to diligence and induſtry in their callings. And how much this conduces to the advancement of mens fortunes, daily experience teaches. And the wiſe man hath told us, *The diligent hand makes rich*, Prov. x. 4. And again, *Seeſt thou a man diligent in buſineſs? he ſhall ſtand before princes, he ſhall not ſtand before mean perſons*, Prov. xxii. 29.

And where men, by reaſon of the difficult circumſtances of their condition, cannot arrive to any eminency of eſtate; yet religion makes a compenſation for this, by teaching men to be contented with that moderate and competent fortune which God hath given them. For the ſhorteſt way to be rich is, not by enlarging our eſtates, but by contracting our deſires. What Seneca ſays of philoſophy, is much more true of religion, *Præſtat opes ſapientia, quas cuicunque fecit ſupervacuas dedit*: "It "makes all thoſe rich to whom it makes riches ſuper-"fluous;" and they are ſo to thoſe who are taught by religion to be contented with ſuch a portion of them as God's providence hath thought fit to allot to them.

3*dly*, As to our reputation. There is nothing gives a man a more firm and eſtabliſhed reputation among wiſe and ſerious perſons, whoſe judgment is only valuable, than a prudent and ſubſtantial piety. This doth many times command reverence and eſteem from the worſer ſort of men, and ſuch as are no great friends to religion; and ſometimes the force of truth will extort an acknowledgment of its excellency, even from its greateſt enemies. I know very well that good men may, and often do blemiſh the reputation of their piety by overacting ſome things in religion; by an indiſcreet zeal about things wherein religion is not concerned; by an ungrateful auſterity and ſowreneſs, which religion doth not require; by little affectations, and an imprudent oſtentation of devotion. But a ſubſtantial and ſolid, a diſcreet and unaffected piety, which makes no great noiſe and ſhow, but expreſſes itſelf in a conſtant and ſerious devotion, and is accompanied with the fruits of goodneſs, and kindneſs, and righteouſneſs towards men, will not only give a man a credit and value among the ſober and the

the virtuous, but even among the vitious and more degenerate sort of men. Upon this account it is that the Apostle adviseth Christians, if they would recommend themselves to the esteem of God and men, earnestly to mind the weighty and substantial parts of religion: *Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost: for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

It is true indeed, there are some persons of so profligate a temper, and of such an inveterate enmity to all goodness, as to scorn and reproach even religion and virtue itself. But the reproach of such persons does not really wound a man's reputation. For why should any man be troubled at the contumelies of those whose judgment deserves not to be valued, who despise goodness and good men out of malice and ignorance? If these reproaches which they cast upon them were the censures of wise and sober men, a man's reputation might be concerned in them; but they are the rash words of inconsiderate and injudicious men, the extravagant speeches of those who are unexperienced in the things they speak against: and therefore no wise man will be troubled at them, or think either religion or himself disparaged by them.

4*thly*, As to our relations. Religion also conduceth to the happiness of these, as it derives a large and extensive blessing upon all that belongs to us; the goodness of God being so diffusive as to scatter his blessings *round about the habitations of the just*, and *to shew mercy unto thousands of them that love him, and keep his commandments*. So David tells us, *Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments: His seed shall be mighty upon the earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house; and his righteousness endureth for ever*, Psal. cxii. v. 2. 3. And so Solomon: *A good man leaveth an inheritance to his childrens children*, Prov. xiii. 22. And again, *In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge*, Prov. xiv. 26. But the wicked derives a curse upon all that is related to him: he is said *to trouble his own house*, Prov. xi. 29.

And again, *The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the houſe of the righteous ſhall ſtand*, Prov. xii. 7.

But, ſetting aſide the conſideration of God's providence, religion doth likewiſe in its own nature tend to the welfare of thoſe who are related to us; becauſe it lays the ſtricteſt obligations upon men to take care of their families and relations, and to make the beſt proviſion both for their comfortable ſubſiſtence here in this world, and their ſalvation in the next. And thoſe who neglect theſe duties, the ſcripture is ſo far from eſteeming them Chriſtians, that it accounts them worſe than Heathens and infidels: *He that provideth not for his own, eſpecially thoſe of his own houſe, is worſe than an infidel, and hath denied the faith*, 1 Tim. v. 8. This I know is ſpoken in reſpect of temporal proviſion; but it holds *à fortiori* as to the care of their ſouls.

Beſides, it is many times ſeen, that the poſterity of holy and good men, eſpecially of ſuch as have evidenced their piety towards God by bounty and charity to men, have met with unuſual kindneſs and reſpect from others, and have by a ſtrange and ſecret diſpoſition of divine providence been unexpectedly cared and provided for; and that, as they have all the reaſon in the world to believe, upon the account and for the ſake of the piety and charity of their parents. This David tells us from his own particular obſervation: *I have been young, and now am old: yet have I not ſeen the righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging bread*, Pſal. xxxvii. 25. And that by the *righteous* is here meant the good and merciful man appears from the deſcription of him in the next words, *He is ever merciful and lendeth: and his ſeed is bleſſed*, ℣ 26. And on the contrary, the poſterity of the wicked do many times inherit the fruit of their fathers ſins and vices; and that not only by a juſt judgment of God, but from the natural courſe and conſequence of things. And in this ſenſe that expreſſion in Job is often verified, that *God lays up the iniquity of wicked men for their children*, Job xxi. 19. And doth not experience teſtify, that the intemperate and unjuſt do many times tranſmit their bodily infirmities and diſeaſes to their children, and entail a ſecret curſe upon their eſtates, which does either inſenſibly waſte and conſume it, or eat out the heart and comfort

ſort of it? Thus you ſee how religion in all reſpects conduces to the happineſs of this life.

Secondly, Religion and virtue do likewiſe moſt certainly and directly tend to the eternal happineſs and ſalvation of men in the other world. And this is incomparably the greateſt advantage that redounds to men by being religious; in compariſon of which all temporal conſiderations *are leſs than nothing, and vanity*. The worldly advantages that religion brings to men in this preſent life are a ſenſible recommendation of religion even to the loweſt and meaneſt ſpirits. But to thoſe who are raiſed above ſenſe, and aſpire after immortality, who believe the perpetual duration of their ſouls, and the reſurrection of their bodies; to thoſe who are thoroughly convinced of the inconſiderableneſs of this ſhort dying life, and of all the concernments of it, in compariſon of that eternal ſtate which remains for us in another life: to theſe, I ſay, the conſideration of a future happineſs, and of thoſe unſpeakable and everlaſting rewards which ſhall then be given to holineſs and virtue, is certainly the moſt powerful motive, and the moſt likely to prevail upon them. For thoſe who are perſuaded that they ſhall continue for ever, cannot chuſe but aſpire after a happineſs commenſurate to their duration; nor can any thing that is conſcious to itſelf of its own immortality, be ſatisfied and contented with any thing leſs than the hopes of an endleſs felicity. And this hope religion alone gives men; and the Chriſtian religion only can ſettle men in a firm and unſhaken aſſurance of it. But becauſe all men who have entertained any religion have conſented to theſe principles, of the immortality of the ſoul, and the recompences of another world, and have always promiſed to themſelves ſome rewards of piety and virtue after this life; and becauſe I did more particularly deſign from this text to ſpeak of the temporal benefits and advantages which redound to men from religion: therefore I ſhall content myſelf to ſhew very briefly how a religious and virtuous life doth conduce to our future happineſs; and that upon theſe two accounts; from the promiſe of God, and from the nature of the thing.

1*ſt*, From the promiſe of God. *Godlineſs* (ſaith the Apoſtle) *hath the promiſe of the life that is to come*, 1 Tim. iv. 8.

iv. 8. God hath all along in the ſcripture ſuſpended the promiſe of eternal life upon this condition. He hath peremptorily declared, that without obedience and holineſs of life no man ſhall ever ſee the Lord. And this very thing, that it is the conſtitution and appointment of God, might be argument enough to us, (if there were no other), to convince us of the neceſſity of obeying the laws of God in order to our happineſs, and to perſuade us thereunto. For eternal life is the gift of God, and he may do what he will with his own. He is maſter of his own favours, and may diſpenſe them upon what terms and conditions he pleaſes. But it is no hard condition that he hath impoſed upon us. If religion brought no advantages to us in this world, yet the happineſs of heaven is ſo great as will abundantly recompenſe all our pains and endeavours: there is temptation enough in the reward to engage any man in the work. Had God thought fit to have impoſed the moſt grievous and difficult things upon us, ought we not to have ſubmitted to them, and to have undertaken them with chearfulneſs, upon ſuch great and glorious encouragements? As Naaman's ſervants ſaid to him in another caſe, *Had he bid thee do ſome great thing, wouldſt thou not have done it?* So if God had ſaid, that without poverty and actual martyrdom *no man ſhall ſee the Lord*, would not any man that believes heaven and hell, and underſtands what theſe words ſignify, and what it is to eſcape extreme and eternal miſery, and to enjoy unſpeakable and endleſs glory, have been willing to accept theſe conditions? *How much more, when he hath only ſaid, Waſh and be clean; and, Let every man that hath this hope in him, purify himſelf, as he is pure?* But God hath not dealt thus with us; nor is the impoſing of this condition of eternal life a mere arbitrary conſtitution. Therefore I ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

2*dly*, That a religious and holy life doth from the very nature and reaſon of the thing conduce to our future happineſs, by way of neceſſary diſpoſition and preparation of us for it. We cannot be otherwiſe happy, but by our conformity to God; without this we cannot poſſibly love him, nor find any pleaſure or happineſs in communion with him: for we cannot love a nature contra-

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ry to our own, nor delight to converſe with it. Therefore religion, in order to the fitting of us for the happineſs of the next life, does deſign to mortify our luſts and paſſions, and to reſtrain us from the inordinate love of the groſs and ſenſual delights of this world; to call off our minds from theſe inferior things, and to raiſe them to higher and more ſpiritual objects, that we may be diſpoſed for the happineſs of the other world, and taught to reliſh the delights of it: whereas, ſhould we ſet our hearts only upon theſe things, and be able to taſte no pleaſure in any thing but what is ſenſual and earthly, we muſt needs be extremely miſerable when we come into the other world; becauſe we ſhould meet with nothing to entertain ourſelves withal, no employment ſuitable to our diſpoſition, no pleaſure that would agree with our depraved appetites and vitious inclinations. All that heaven and happineſs ſignifies, is unſuitable to a wicked man, and therefore could be no felicity to him. But this I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak more fully to in my next diſcourſe.

From all that hath been ſaid, the reaſonableneſs of religion clearly appears, which tends ſo directly to the happineſs of men, and is upon all accounts calculated for our benefit. Let but all things be truly conſidered and caſt up, and it will be found that there is no advantage to any man from an irreligious and vitious courſe of life. I challenge any one to inſtance in any real benefit that ever came to him this way. Let the ſinner declare what he hath found by experience. Hath lewdneſs and intemperance been more for his health than if he had lived chaſtely and ſoberly? hath falſhood and injuſtice proved at the long-run more for the advancement and ſecurity of his eſtate, than truth and honeſty would have done? hath any vice that he hath lived in made him more true friends, and gained him a better reputation in the world, than the practice of holineſs and virtue would have done? hath he found that peace and ſatisfaction of mind in an evil courſe, and that quiet enjoyment of himſelf, and comfortable aſſurance of God's favour, and good hopes of his future condition, which a religious and virtuous life would have given him? Nay, on the contrary, have not ſome of his vices weakened

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his body, and broken his health? have not others diſſipated his eſtate, and reduced him to want? What notorious vice is there that doth not blemiſh a man's reputation, and make him either hated or deſpiſed; and that not only by the wiſe and the virtuous, but even by the generality of men? But was ever any wicked man free from the ſtings of a guilty conſcience, and the torment of a reſtleſs and uneaſy mind; from the ſecret dread of divine diſpleaſure, and of the vengeance of another world? Let the ſinner freely ſpeak the very inward ſenſe of his ſoul in this matter, and ſpare not; and I doubt not, if he will deal clearly and impartially, but that he will acknowledge all this to be true, and is able to confirm it from his own ſad experience. For this is the natural fruit of ſin, and the preſent revenge which it takes upon ſinners, beſides that fearful puniſhment which ſhall be inflicted on them in another life.

What reaſon then can any man pretend againſt religion, when it is ſo apparently for the benefit, not only of human ſociety, but of every particular perſon; when there is no real intereſt of this world, but may ordinarily be as effectually promoted, and purſued to as great advantage, nay uſually to far greater, by a man that *lives ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in the world*, than by any one that leads the contrary courſe of life? Let no man then ſay, with thoſe profane perſons whom the Prophet ſpeaks of, *It is in vain to ſerve the Lord: and what profit is it that we have kept his commandments?* Mal. iii. 14. God has not been ſo hard a maſter to us, that we have reaſon thus to complain of him. He hath given us no laws, but what are for our good; nay, ſo gracious hath he been to us, as to link together our duty and our intereſt, and to make thoſe very things the inſtances of our obedience which are the natural means and cauſes of our happineſs. The devil was ſo far in the right, when he charged Job that he did not *ſerve God for nought*. It is he himſelf that is the hard maſter, and makes men ſerve him for nought, who rewards his drudges and ſlaves with nothing but ſhame, and ſorrow, and miſery. But God requires no man's ſervice upon hard and unreaſonable terms. The greateſt part of our work is a preſent reward to itſelf; and for whatever elſe we do or ſuffer for

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him, he offers us abundant consideration. And if men did but truly and wisely love themselves, they would upon this very ground, if there were no other, become religious. For, when all is done, there is no man can serve his own interest better than by serving God. Religion conduceth both to our present and future happiness. And when the gospel chargeth us with piety towards God, and justice and charity towards men, and temperance and chastity in reference to ourselves, the true interpretation of these laws is this, God requires of men, in order to their eternal happiness, that they should do those things which tend to their temporal welfare; that is, in plainer words, he promises to make us happy for ever, upon condition that we will but do that which is best for ourselves in this world. To conclude, Religion is founded in the interest of men rightly apprehended. So that, if *the god of this world*, and the lusts of men, did not *blind their eyes*, so as to render them unfit to discern their true interest, it would be impossible, so long as men love themselves, and desire their own happiness, to keep them from being religious; for they could not but conclude that to be their interest; and, being so convinced, they would resolve to pursue it, and stick to it.

SERMON V.

The excellency of the Christian religion.

PHIL. iii. 8.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Apostle makes a comparison between the Jewish and the Christian religion, and shews the Christian to be in truth and substance what the Jewish was only in type and shadow: ℣ 3. *We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit.*

rit. And then he enumerates the ſeveral privileges he was partaker of by virtue of his being born in the Jewiſh church, ℣ 4. 5. 6. *Though I might alſo have confidence in the fleſh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might truſt in the fleſh, I more: circumciſed the eighth day, of the ſtock of Iſrael,* &c. And yet he tells us he was contented to forego all theſe advantages for Chriſt and the Chriſtian religion, ℣ 7. *But what things were gain to me, thoſe I counted loſs for Chriſt.* And not only theſe, but if there were any thing elſe that men value in this world, he was willing to hazard that alſo upon the ſame account: ℣ 8. *Yea doubtleſs, and I count all things but loſs, for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus my Lord.*

In which words the Apoſtle declares the high eſteem he had for the Chriſtian religion, which he calls *the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus* his *Lord*; the excellency whereof appeared ſo great to him, that he valued nothing in compariſon of the advantages which he had by the knowledge of it.

My deſign at this time from this text is, to repreſent the excellency of this knowledge of the Chriſtian religion above that of any other religion or inſtitution in the world. And here I ſhall not conſider the external evidence which we have of the truth of Chriſtianity, and of the divinity of its doctrine, in which reſpect it hath incomparably the advantage of any other religion; but only the internal excellency of the doctrine itſelf, abſtracting from the divine authority of it; and that in theſe four reſpects.

1. As it does more clearly reveal to us the nature of God, which is the great foundation of all religion.

2. As it gives us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives.

3. As it propounds to us more powerful arguments to perſuade men to the obedience of this law.

4. As it furniſhes us with better motives and conſiderations to patience and contentedneſs under the evils and afflictions of this life. Now, theſe are the greateſt advantages that any religion can have; to give men right apprehenſions of God, a perfect rule of good life, and efficacious arguments to perſuade men to be good, and patiently

patiently to bear the evils and ſufferings of this life. And theſe ſhall be the heads of my following diſcourſe.

Firſt, The Chriſtian religion doth more clearly reveal to us the nature of God than any religion ever did. And to have right apprehenſions of God, is the great foundation of all religion. For according as mens notions of God are, ſuch will their religion be. If men have groſs and falſe conceptions of God, their religion will be abſurd and ſuperſtitious. If men fancy God to be an ill-natured being, armed with infinite power, one that delights in the miſery and ruin of his creatures, and is ready to take all advantages againſt them; they may fear him, but they will hate him: and they will be apt to be ſuch towards one another, as they fancy God to be towards them; for all religion doth naturally incline men to imitate him whom they worſhip.

Now, the Chriſtian religion gives us a more perfect, and a more lovely character of God than any religion ever did. It repreſents him to us as a pure ſpirit, which the Heathens did not generally believe; and that he is to be worſhipped in ſuch a manner as is moſt ſuitable to his ſpiritual nature; which not only the Heathens, but even the Jews themſelves were extremely miſtaken about. *God is a ſpirit*, (ſays our Saviour), *and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.* It is true indeed, God himſelf did command ſacrifices to the Jews, and all thoſe external and troubleſome obſervances of which their religion did conſiſt. But then it is to be conſidered, that he did not inſtitute this way of worſhip becauſe it was moſt ſuitable to his own nature, but becauſe of the carnality of their hearts, and the proneneſs of that people to idolatry. God did not preſcribe theſe things becauſe they were beſt, but becauſe the temper of that people would then admit of nothing better. And this the ſcripture gives us ſeveral intimations of: *Thou deſireſt not ſacrifice, thou delighteſt not in burnt-offerings*, ſaith David, Pſal. li. 16. And elſewhere more expreſsly to this purpoſe: *I ſpake not unto your fathers*, (ſays God by the Prophet Jeremiah), *nor commanded them in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and ſacrifices. But this thing commanded I them, ſaying, Obey my voice*, Jer. vii. 22. 23. A

sufficient intimation, that God did not primarily intend to appoint this way of worship, and to impose it upon them, as that which was most proper and agreeable to him; but that he condescended to it as most accommodate to their present state and inclination. And in this sense also some understand what God says to the same people by the Prophet Ezekiel, that he *gave them statutes that were not good*, Ezek. xx. 25.

And as the Christian religion gives a more perfect, so a more amiable and lovely character of the divine nature. No religion that ever was in the world, does so fully represent the goodness of God, and his tender love to mankind; which is the best and most powerful argument to the love of God. The Heathens did generally dread God, and looked upon him as fierce, and cruel, and revengeful; and therefore they endeavoured to appease him by the horrid and barbarous sacrifices of men, and of their own children. And all along in the Old Testament, God is generally represented as very strict and severe. But there are no where so plain and full declarations of his mercy and love to the sons of men as are made in the gospel. In the Old Testament God is usually styled *The Lord of hosts; The great and the terrible God*: but in the New Testament, he is represented to us by milder titles, *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; The Father of mercies, and the God of all consolations; The God of all patience; The God of love and peace*: nay, he is said to be *love* itself, and to *dwell in love*. And this difference between the style of the Old and New Testament is so remarkable, that one of the greatest sects in the primitive church (I mean that of the Gnosticks) did upon this very ground found their heresy of two Gods; the one evil, and fierce, and cruel, whom they called the God of the Old Testament; the other good, and kind, and merciful, whom they called the God of the New. So great a difference is there between the representations which are made of God in the books of the Jewish and the Christian religion, as to give at least some colour and pretence for an imagination of two Gods.

Secondly, Christian religion hath given us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives. It hath made our duty more plain and certain in many instances,

inſtances, than either the philoſophy of the Heathen, or the precepts of Moſes, had done. It commands univerſal love, and kindneſs, and good-will among men; a readineſs to forgive our greateſt enemies; *to do good to them that hate us, to bleſs them that curſe us, and to pray for them that deſpitefully uſe us, and perſecute us:* and does inculcate theſe precepts more vehemently, and forbid malice, and hatred, and revenge, and contention, more ſtrictly and peremptorily, than any religion ever did before; as will appear to any one that does but attentively read our Saviour's ſermon upon the mount.

And as Chriſtianity hath given us a more certain, ſo likewiſe a more perfect law for the government of our lives. All the precepts of it are reaſonable and wiſe, requiring ſuch duties of us as are ſuitable to the light of nature, and do approve themſelves to the beſt reaſon of mankind; ſuch as have their foundation in the nature of God, and are an imitation of the divine excellencies; ſuch as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to raiſe the minds of men to the higheſt pitch of goodneſs and virtue. The laws of our religion are ſuch as are generally uſeful and beneficial to the world, as do tend to the outward peace and health, to the inward comfort and contentment, and to the univerſal happineſs of mankind. They command nothing that is unneceſſary and burdenſome, as were the numerous rites and ceremonies of the Jewiſh religion, but what is reaſonable, and uſeful, and ſubſtantial; and they omit nothing that may tend to the glory of God, or the welfare of men; nor do they reſtrain us in any thing, but what is contrary, either to the regular inclinations of nature, or to our reaſon and true intereſt. They forbid us nothing but what is baſe and unworthy, to ſerve our humours and paſſions, to reproach our underſtandings, and to make ourſelves fools and beaſts; in a word, nothing but what tends either to our private harm and prejudice, or to publick diſorder and confuſion.

And that this is the tenor of the laws of the goſpel, will appear to any one from our Saviour's ſermons and diſcourſes; particularly that upon the mount; wherein he charges his diſciples and followers to be humble, and meek, and righteous, and merciful, and pure, and peace-

able, and patient under sufferings and persecutions; and good and kind to all, even to those that are evil, and injurious to us; and to endeavour to excel in all goodness and virtue. This will appear likewise from the writings of the holy Apostles. I will instance but in some few passages in them. St. Paul represents to us the design of the Christian doctrine in a very few words, but of admirable sense and weight: *The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world,* Tit. ii. 11. 12. The same Apostle makes this the main and fundamental condition of the covenant of the gospel on our part: *Let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity,* 2 Tim. ii. 19. St. James describes the Christian doctrine, which he calls the *wisdom that is from above,* by these characters: *It is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy,* Jam. iii. 17. St. Peter calls the gospel, *the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby* (saith he) *are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,* 2 Pet. i. 3. 4.; and upon this consideration he exhorts them, *to give all diligence to add to their faith* the several virtues of a good life; without which he tells them *they are barren, and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,* ℣ 5. 6. 7. 8. I will conclude with that full and comprehensive passage of St. Paul to the Philippians, *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest,* (ὅσα σεμνὰ, whatsoever things are of venerable esteem), *whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure,* (or chaste), *whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things,* Phil. iv. 8.

But the perfection and the reasonableness of the laws of Christianity, will most plainly appear, by taking a brief survey of them. And they may all be referred to these two general heads. They are either such as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to make men singly and personally

personally good, or such as tend to the peace and happiness of human society.

I. Such as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to make men good singly and personally considered. And the precepts of this kind may be distributed likewise into two sorts; such as injoin piety towards God, or such as require the good order and government of ourselves in respect of the enjoyments and pleasures of this life.

1. Such as injoin piety towards God. All the duties of Christian religion which respect God, are no other but what natural light prompts men to; excepting the two sacraments, which are of great use and significancy in the Christian religion, and praying to God in the name and by the mediation of Jesus Christ. For the sum of natural religion, as it refers more immediately to God, is this, That we should inwardly reverence and love God; and that we should express our inward reverence and love to him, by external worship and adoration, and by our readiness to receive and obey all the revelations of his will; and that we should testify our dependence upon him, and our confidence of his goodness, by constant prayers and supplications to him for mercy and help for ourselves and others; and that we should acknowledge our obligations to him for the many favours and benefits which every day and every minute we receive from him, by continual praises and thanksgivings: and that, on the contrary, we should not entertain any unworthy thoughts of God, nor give that honour and reverence which is due to him, to any other; that we should not worship him in any manner, that is either unsuitable to the excellency and perfection of his nature, or contrary to his revealed will; that we should carefully avoid the profane and irreverent use of his name, by cursing, or customary swearing, and take heed of the neglect or contempt of his worship, or any thing belonging to it. This is the sum of the first part of natural religion; and these are the general heads of those duties which every man's reason tells him he owes to God: and these are the very things which the Christian religion does expressly require of us; as might be evidenced from particular texts in the New Testament. So that there is nothing in this

part of Christianity, but what agrees very well with the reason of mankind.

2. Such precepts as require the good order and government of ourselves in respect of the pleasures and enjoyments of this life. Christian religion commands whatsoever things are pure and chaste; all manner of sobriety, and temperance, and moderation, in reference to our appetites and passions; and forbids whatever is unnatural, and unreasonable, and unhealthful, in the use of pleasures, and of any of God's creatures. Hither belong all those texts which require of us, that we should *not walk after the flesh, but after the spirit*, Rom. viii. 1.; that we should *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*, 2 Cor. vii. 1.; that we should *be holy in all manner of conversation*, 1 Pet. i. 15. St. John distributes the lusts and irregular appetites of men into three kinds; voluptuousness, covetousness, and ambition; answerable to the three sorts of tempting objects that are in the world; pleasures, riches, and honours: *All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*, &c. 1 John ii. 16. And Christianity doth strictly forbid all these: *Take heed, and beware of covetousness*, (says our Saviour; and he adds this excellent reason); *for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*, Luke xii. 15. It forbids pride, and ambition, and vain-glory; and commands humility, and modesty, and condescension to others: *Learn of me*, (says our Saviour), *for I am meek and lowly in spirit*, Matth. xi. 29. *Mind not high things, but condescend to them that are of low degree*, Rom. xii. 16. *Let nothing be done through vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*, Phil. ii. 3. And in reference to sensual pleasures, it forbids all irregularity and excess, and strictly injoins purity and temperance; cautioning us, *to take heed lest we be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness*, Luke xxi. 34.; charging us, *to walk decently as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness*, Rom. xiii. 13.; *to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*, 1 Pet. ii. 11. Now, all these precepts do not only tend to beget in us such virtues and dispositions as are reasonable, and suitable to our nature, and every way for our temporal

temporal convenience and advantage, but ſuch as do likewiſe exceedingly diſpoſe us to piety and religion, by purifying our ſouls from the droſs and filth of ſenſual delights: for covetouſneſs debaſeth a man's ſpirit, and ſinks it into the earth; intemperance and luſt cloud a man's underſtanding, and indiſpoſe it for the contemplation of things ſpiritual and divine.

Thus you ſee how the precepts of Chriſtianity do tend to the perfection of human nature, conſidering men ſingly and perſonally.

II. The other ſort of precepts are ſuch as tend to the peace and happineſs of human ſociety. And the reaſon of mankind can deviſe nothing more proper to this end, than the laws of Chriſtianity are; for they command all thoſe virtues which are apt to ſweeten the ſpirits, and allay the paſſions and animoſities of men one towards another. They require us *to love our neighbour* (that is, every man in the world, even our greateſt enemies) *as ourſelves*. And for this end, among others, was the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper, the feaſt of love, inſtituted; that, by commemorating the love of our dying Saviour, who laid down his life for his enemies, we might be put in mind how we ought to love one another.

And by this law of loving all men, even our enemies, the Chriſtian religion diſcovers itſelf, not only to be the moſt innocent and harmleſs, but the moſt generous and beſt-natured inſtitution that ever was in the world: for, in purſuance of this general precept, it commands us, *to do good to all men; if it be poſſible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men*: to *be kind one to another*, ready to gratify and oblige men; to be *tender-hearted* and compaſſionate towards thoſe that are in want or miſery, and ready to ſupply and relieve them; to ſympathiſe with one another in our joys and ſorrows; *to mourn with thoſe that mourn, and to rejoice with them that rejoice; to bear one another's burdens, and to forbear one another in love*; to be eaſily reconciled to them that have offended us; and to be ready to *forgive from our hearts* the greateſt injuries that can be done to us, and that without bounds and limits, *even to ſeventy times ſeven*, as our Saviour expreſſeth it.

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The laws of Christianity do likewise secure both the private interests of men, and the publick peace, by confirming and inforcing all the dictates of nature concerning justice and equity, and our doing to others as we would have them to do to us; and by commanding obedience to human laws, which decide mens rights, and submission to government, under pain of damnation: and by forbidding whatever is contrary to these: violence and oppression, defrauding and over-reaching one another, perfidiousness and treachery, breach of trust, oaths, or promises, undutifulness to superiors, sedition and rebellion against magistracy and authority; and if there be any thing else that is apt to disturb the peace of the world, and to alienate the affections of men from one another, as sowrenes of disposition, and rudeness of behaviour, censoriousness, and sinister interpretation of things, all cross and distasteful humours, and whatever else may render the conversation of men grievous and uneasy to one another: all these are either expressly, or by clear consequence and deduction, forbidden in the New Testament.

And now what could any religion do more towards the reforming of the dispositions and manners of men? What laws can be devised more proper and effectual to advance the nature of man to its highest perfection, to procure the tranquillity of mens minds, and the peace and happiness of the world, than these precepts of Christianity are? Several of which, as those of loving our enemies, of not revenging injuries, of rendering good for evil, &c. though they have been esteemed reasonable by some of the wisest among the Heathen; yet, by reason of the degeneracy of the world, and of the obscurity and uncertainty of human reason, they never obtained to have the estimation and force of natural laws. So that we owe to Christianity the discovery of the most certain and perfect rule of life that ever the world was acquainted withal.

Thirdly, Christian religion propounds the most powerful arguments to persuade men to the obedience of these laws. The gospel offers such considerations to us, as are fit to work very forcibly upon two of the most swaying and governing passions in the mind of man; our hopes,

hopes, and our fears. To encourage our hopes, it gives us the highest assurance of the greatest and most lasting happiness, in case of obedience; and, to awaken our fears, it threatens sinners with the most dreadful and durable torments, in case of disobedience. *To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality,* it promiseth *eternal life: but unto them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness,* it threatens *indignation, and wrath, tribulation, and anguish,* Rom. ii. 7. 8. 9. And this is that which makes the doctrine of the gospel so powerful an instrument for the reforming of the world, that it proposes to men such glorious rewards, and such terrible punishments, as no religion ever did; and, to make the consideration of them more effectual, it gives us far greater assurance of the reality and certainty of these things, than ever the world had before. This account the Apostle gives us of the success and efficacy of the gospel upon the minds of men; and for this reason he calls it *the power of God unto salvation,* because therein *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men,* Rom. i. 16. 18. Before the revelation of the gospel, the wickedness and impenitency of the Heathen world was a much more excusable thing; because they were in a great measure ignorant of the rewards of another life, and had generally but very uncertain and obscure apprehensions of those things which urge men most powerfully to forsake their sins, and are the most prevalent arguments to a good life. So St. Paul tells the Athenians, the most knowing among the Heathen: *The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead,* Acts xvii. 30. 31. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, hath given the world that full assurance of another life after this, and of a future judgment, which it never had before; for he whom God raised from the dead, did declare and testify, that *it was he who was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead,* Acts x. 42. And the firm belief of a future judgment, which

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shall *render to every man according to his deeds*, if it be well considered, is to a reasonable nature the most forcible motive of all other to a good life; because it is taken from the consideration of the greatest and most lasting happiness and misery that human nature is capable of. So that the laws of Christianity have the firmest sanction of any laws in the world to secure the obedience and observance of them: for what can restrain men from sin, if the terrors of the Lord, and the evident danger of eternal destruction, will not? what encouragement can be given to goodness beyond the hopes of heaven, and the assurance of an endless felicity?

Fourthly, The Christian religion furnisheth us with the best motives and considerations to patience and contentedness under the evils and afflictions of this life. This was one great design of philosophy, to support men under the evils and calamities which this life is incident to, and to fortify their spirits against sufferings. And to this end, the wisest among the Heathens racked their wits, and cast about every way; they advanced all sorts of principles, and managed every little argument and consideration to the utmost advantage: and yet, after all these attempts, they have not been able to give any considerable comfort and ease to the mind of man under any of the great evils and pressures of this life: *The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself upon it, and the covering narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it.* All the wise sayings and advices which philosophers could muster up to this purpose, have proved ineffectual to the common people, and the generality of mankind; and have helped only to support some few stout and obstinate minds, which, without the assistance of philosophy, would have held up pretty well of themselves.

Some of the philosophers have run so far back for arguments of comfort against pain, as to call every thing into question, and to doubt whether there were any such thing as sense or pain. And yet for all that, when any great evil has been upon them, they would certainly sigh and groan as pitifully, and cry out as loud, as other men.

Others have sought to ease themselves of all the evil of affliction, by disputing subtilly against it; and pertinaciously

only maintaining that afflictions are no real evils, but only in opinion and imagination; and therefore a wise man ought not to be troubled at them. But he must be a very wise man that can forbear being troubled at things that are very troublesome. And yet thus Possidonius, as Tully tells us, distinguished. He could not deny pain to be very troublesome; but for all that he was resolved never to acknowledge it to be an evil. But sure, it is a very slender comfort that relies upon this nice distinction, between things being troublesome and being evils, when all the evil of affliction lies in the trouble it creates to us. But when the best that can be is made of this argument, it is good for nothing, but to be thrown away as a stupid paradox, and against the common sense of mankind.

Others have endeavoured to delude their trouble by a graver way of reasoning, That these things are fatal and necessary; and therefore no body ought to be troubled at them, it being in vain to be troubled at that which we cannot help. And yet perhaps it might as reasonably be said on the other side, that this very consideration, that a thing cannot be helped, is one of the justest causes of trouble to a wise man. For it were some kind of comfort, if these evils were to be avoided; because then we might be careful to prevent them another time: but if they be necessary, then my trouble is as fatal as the calamity that occasions it; and though I know it is in vain to be troubled for that which I cannot help, yet I cannot chuse but be afflicted. It was a smart reply that Augustus made to one that ministered this comfort to him of the fatality of things: *Hoc ipsum est* (says he) *quod me malè habet:* This was so far from giving any ease to his mind, that "this was the very thing that troubled him."

Others have tried to divert and entertain the troubles of other men by pretty and plausible sayings, such as this, That if evils are long, they are but light; if sharp, but short; and a hundred such like. Now, I am apt to imagine, that it is but very small comfort that a plain and ordinary man lying under a sharp fit of the stone for a week together, receives from this fine sentence. For what pleasure soever men that are at ease and leisure may take in being the authors of witty sayings, I doubt it is

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but poor conſolation that a man under great and ſtinging afflictions finds from them.

The beſt moral argument to patience, in my opinion, is, the advantage of patience itſelf. To bear evils as quietly as we can, is the way to make them lighter and eaſier. But to toſs and fling, and to be reſtleſs, is good for nothing, but to fret and inrage our pain, to gall our ſores, and to make the burthen that is upon us ſit more uneaſy. But this is properly no conſideration of comfort, but an art of managing ourſelves under afflictions, ſo as not to make them more grievous than indeed they are.

But now the arguments which Chriſtianity propounds to us are ſuch as are a juſt and reaſonable encouragement to men to bear ſufferings patiently. Our religion ſets before us, not the example of a ſtupid Stoick, who had by obſtinate principles hardened himſelf againſt all ſenſe of pain beyond the common meaſures of humanity; but an example that lies level to all mankind, of a man like ourſelves, that had a tender ſenſe of the leaſt ſuffering, and yet patiently endured the greateſt; of *Jeſus, the author and finiſher of our faith; who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, and is ſet down at the right hand of the throne of God*, Heb. xii. 2.

God thought it expedient that the firſt Chriſtians ſhould by great hardſhips and perſecutions be trained up for glory; and to animate and encourage them hereto, the *captain of our ſalvation was crowned by ſufferings*, Heb. ii. 10. Much more ſhould the conſideration of this pattern arm us with patience againſt the common and ordinary calamities of this life, eſpecially if we conſider his example with this advantage, that though his ſufferings were wholly undeſerved, and not for himſelf, but for us, yet he bore them patiently.

But the main conſideration of all is, the glory which ſhall follow our ſufferings as the reward of them, if they be for God and his cauſe; and if upon any other innocent account, as a reward of our patience: *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. iv. 17. Chriſtian religion hath ſecured us that we ſhall be infinite gainers

gainers by our sufferings. And who would not be content to suffer upon terms of such advantage? *to pass through many tribulations into the kingdom of God?* and to endure a short affliction for an endless happiness? The assurance of a future blessedness is a cordial that will revive our spirits more in the day of adversity than all the wise sayings and considerations of philosophy.

These are the arguments which Christianity propounds to us; and they are firm and sound at the bottom. They have strength and substance in them, and are apt to work upon human nature; and the most ordinary understanding is capable of the force of them. In the strength and virtue of this great example, and in contemplation of this glorious reward, with what resolution and chearfulness, with what courage and patience, did vast numbers of all sorts of people in the first ages of Christianity, not only men, but women; not only those of greater spirit and more generous education, but those of the poorest and lowest condition; not only the learned and the wise, but the ignorant and illiterate, encounter all the rage and malice of the world, and embrace torments and death? Had the precepts and counsels of philosophy ever any such effect upon the minds of men? I will conclude this with a passage in the life of Lipsius, who was a great studier and admirer of the Stoical philosophy. When he lay upon his death-bed, and one of his friends who came to visit him told him, that he needed not use arguments to persuade him to patience under his pains, the philosophy which he had studied so much would furnish him with motives enough to that purpose, he answers him with this ejaculation: *Domine Jesu, da mihi patientiam Christianam:* "Lord Jesus, give me "Christian patience." No patience like to that which the considerations of Christianity are apt to work in us.

And now I have, as briefly and plainly as I could, endeavoured to represent to you the excellency of the Christian religion; both in respect of the clear discoveries which it makes to us of the nature of God, which is the great foundation of all religion; and likewise in respect of the perfection of its laws, and the power of its arguments, to persuade men both to obey and suffer the will of God. By which you may see what the pro-

per tendency and design of this religion is, and what the laws and precepts of it would make men, if they would truly observe them, and live according to them; substantially religious towards God, chaste and temperate, patient and contented in reference to themselves, and the dispensations of God's providence towards them, just and honest, kind and peaceable, and good-natured towards all men. In a word, the gospel describes God to us in all respects such a one as we would wish him to be; gives us such laws as every man that understands himself would chuse to live by; propounds such arguments to persuade to the obedience of these laws as no man that wisely loves himself, and hath any tenderness for his own interest and happiness, either in this world or the other, can refuse to be moved withal.

And now, methinks, I may with some confidence challenge any religion in the world to shew such a compleat body and collection of holy and reasonable laws, established upon such promises and threatenings as the gospel contains. And if any man can produce a religion that can reasonably pretend to an equal or a greater confirmation than the gospel hath, a religion, the precepts, and promises, and threatenings whereof are calculated to make men wiser and better, more temperate and more chaste, more meek and more patient, more kind and more just, than the laws and motives of Christianity are apt to make men; if any man can produce such a religion, I am ready to be of it. Let but any man shew me any book in the world, the doctrines whereof have the seal of such miracles as the doctrine of the scriptures hath; a book which contains the heads of our duty so perfectly, and without the mixture of any thing that is unreasonable, or vitious, or any ways unworthy of God; that commands us every thing in reason necessary to be done, and abridgeth us of no lawful pleasure without offering us abundant recompence for our present self-denial; a book, the rules whereof, if they were practised, would make men more pious and devout, more holy and sober, more just and fair in their dealings, better friends and better neighbours, better magistrates and better subjects, and better in all relations, and which does offer to the understanding of men more powerful arguments

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to perſuade them to be all this: let any man, I ſay, ſhew me ſuch a book, and I will lay aſide the ſcripture, and preach out of that.

And do we not all profeſs to be of this excellent religion, and to ſtudy and believe this holy book of the ſcriptures? But, alas! who will believe that we do ſo, that ſhall look upon the actions, and conſider the lives of the greateſt part of Chriſtians? How groſsly and openly do many of us contradict the plain precepts of the goſpel, by our ungodlineſs and wordly luſts, by living intemperately, or unjuſtly, or profanely in this preſent world? as if *the grace of God which brings ſalvation* had never appeared to us; as if we had never heard of heaven or hell, or believed not one word that the ſcripture ſays concerning them; as if we were in no expectation *of the bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt;* whom God *hath appointed to judge the world in righteouſneſs,* and who will beſtow mighty rewards upon thoſe who faithfully ſerve him; but will come *in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.*

Let us not then deceive ourſelves by pretending to this excellent knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus our Lord, if we do not frame our lives according to it. For though we know thoſe things never ſo well, yet we are not happy unleſs we do them: nay, we are but the more miſerable for knowing them, if we do them not. Therefore it concerns every one of us to conſider ſeriouſly what we believe, and whether our belief of the Chriſtian religion have its due effect upon our lives. If not, all the precepts, and promiſes, and threatenings of the goſpel, will riſe up in judgment againſt us, and the articles of our faith will be ſo many articles of accuſation: and the great weight of our charge will be this, that we did not obey that goſpel which we profeſſed to believe; that we made confeſſion of the Chriſtian faith, but lived like Heathens. Not to believe the Chriſtian religion, after ſo great evidence and confirmation as God hath given to it, is very unreaſonable; but to believe it to be true, and yet to live as if it were falſe, is the greateſt repugnancy and contradiction that can be. He that does not believe

Chriſtianity, either hath, or thinks he hath ſome reaſon for with-holding his aſſent from it: but he that believes it, and yet lives contrary to it, knows that he hath no reaſon for what he does, and is convinced that he ought to do otherwiſe. And he is a miſerable man indeed, that does thoſe things, for the doing of which he continually ſtands condemned by his own mind. And accordingly God will deal more ſeverely with ſuch perſons. He will pardon a thouſand defects in our underſtandings, if they do not proceed from groſs careleſſneſs and neglect of ourſelves: but the faults of our wills have no excuſe; becauſe we knew to do better, and were convinced in our minds that we ought not to have done ſo.

Doſt thou believe, that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men?* and doſt thou ſtill allow thyſelf *in ungodlineſs and worldly luſts?* Art thou convinced that *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord?* and doſt thou ſtill perſiſt in a wicked courſe? Art thou fully perſuaded that no *whoremonger, nor adulterer, nor covetous, nor unrighteous perſon, ſhall have any inheritance in the kingdom of God and Chriſt?* and doſt thou for all that continue to practiſe theſe vices? What canſt thou ſay, man, why it ſhould not be to thee according to thy faith? If it ſo fall out, that thou art miſerable, and undone for ever, thou haſt no reaſon to be ſurpriſed, as if ſome unexpected thing had happened to thee. It is but with thee juſt as thou believedſt it would be when thou didſt theſe things. For how couldſt thou expect that God ſhould accept of thy good belief, when thou didſt ſo notoriouſly contradict it by a bad life? How couldſt thou look for other, but that God ſhould condemn thee for the doing of thoſe things for which thine own conſcience did condemn thee all the while thou waſt doing of them? When we come into the other world, there is no conſideration that will ſting our conſciences more cruelly than this, that we did wickedly when we knew to have done better, and choſe to make ourſelves miſerable when we underſtood the way to have been happy. To conclude, we Chriſtians have certainly the beſt and the holieſt, the wiſeſt and moſt reaſonable religion in the world; but then we are in the worſt condition of all mankind,

mankind, if the beſt religion in the world do not make us good.

SERMON VI.

The precepts of Chriſtianity not grievous.

1 JOHN v. 3.

——*And his commandments are not grievous.*

ONE of the great prejudices which men have entertained againſt the Chriſtian religion, is this, that it lays upon men *heavy burthens, and grievous to be borne;* that the laws of it are very ſtrict and ſevere, difficult to be kept, and yet dangerous to be broken; that it requires us to govern and keep under our paſſions, and to contradict many times our ſtrongeſt inclinations and deſires; *to cut off our right hand,* and *to pluck out our right eye;* to *love our enemies,* to *bleſs them that curſe us,* to *do good to them that hate us,* and to *pray for them that deſpitefully uſe us and perſecute us;* to forgive the greateſt injuries that are done to us, and to make reparation for the leaſt that we do to others; to be contented with our condition, patient under ſufferings, and ready to ſacrifice our deareſt intereſts in this world, and even our very lives, in the cauſe of God and religion. All theſe ſeem to be *hard ſayings,* and *grievous commandments.*

For the removal of this prejudice, I have choſen theſe words of the Apoſtle, which expreſsly tell us the contrary, that *the commandments of God are not grievous.*

And though this be a great truth, if it be impartially conſidered; yet it is alſo a great paradox to men of corrupt minds and vitious practices, who are prejudiced againſt religion, and the holy laws of God, by their intereſt and their luſts. This ſeems a ſtrange propoſition to thoſe who look upon religion at a diſtance, and ne-

ver tried the experiment of a holy life; who meaſure the laws of God, not by the intrinſical goodneſs and equity of them, but by the reluctancy and oppoſition which they find in their own hearts againſt them.

Upon this account it will be requiſite to take ſome pains to ſatisfy the reaſon of men concerning this truth; and, if it be poſſible, to make it ſo evident, that thoſe who are unwilling to own it, may yet be aſhamed to deny it. And methinks I have this peculiar advantage in the argument I have now undertaken, that every reaſonable man cannot chuſe but wiſh me ſucceſs in this attempt; becauſe I undertake the proof of that which it is every man's intereſt that it ſhould be true: and if I can make it out, this pretence againſt religion will not only be baffled, but we ſhall gain a new and forcible argument to perſuade men over to it.

Now, the eaſineſs or difficulty of the obſervation of any laws or commands depends chiefly upon theſe three things.

1. Upon the nature of the laws themſelves, and their ſuitableneſs or unſuitableneſs to thoſe to whom they are given.

2. Upon the ability or weakneſs of thoſe on whom theſe laws are impoſed for the keeping of them. For eaſineſs and difficulty are relative terms, and refer to ſome power; and a thing may be difficult to a weak man, which yet may be eaſy to the ſame perſon when aſſiſted with a greater ſtrength.

3. Upon the encouragement that is given to the obſervation of them. For the propoſal of great rewards does very much qualify and allay the difficulty of any undertaking.

Now, if I can make theſe three things evident; 1. That the laws of God are reaſonable, that is, ſuitable to our nature, and advantageous to our intereſt; 2. That we are not deſtitute of ſufficient power and ability for the performance of them; and, 3. That we have the greateſt encouragements to this purpoſe: then have we all imaginable reaſon to aſſent to the truth of this propoſition, That *the commandments of God are not grievous*.

I. The laws of God are reaſonable; that is, ſuitable to

to our nature, and advantageous to our intereſt. It is true, God hath a ſovereign right over us as we are his creatures, and by virtue of this right he might without injuſtice have impoſed difficult taſks upon us, and have required hard things at our hands: but in making laws for us, he hath not made uſe of this right. He hath commanded us nothing in the goſpel, that is either unſuitable to our reaſon, or prejudical to our intereſt; nay, nothing that is ſevere, and againſt the grain of our nature, but when either the apparent neceſſity of our intereſt does require it, or an extraordinary reward is promiſed to our obedience. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* This is the ſum of the natural law, That we ſhould behave ourſelves reverently and obediently towards the divine Majeſty, and juſtly and charitably towards men; and that, in order to the fitting of us for the better diſcharge of theſe duties, we ſhould govern ourſelves in the uſe of ſenſual delights with temperance and moderation. And if we go over the laws of Chriſtianity, we ſhall find, that, excepting a very few particulars, they injoin the very ſame things; only they have made our duty more clear and certain. But this I have had occaſion to make out largely in the foregoing diſcourſe, and therefore I ſhall ſay the leſs to it now.

As to the ſeveral parts of God's worſhip and ſervice, prayer and thankſgiving, hearing and reading the word of God, and receiving of the ſacrament; theſe are all no leſs for our own comfort and advantage, than for the honour of God and religion. And there is nothing of difficulty or trouble in the external performance of them, but what hypocriſy can make tolerable to itſelf: and certainly they muſt be not only much more eaſy, but even delightful, when they are directed by our underſtandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections.

As for thoſe laws of religion which concern our duty to ourſelves, as temperance and chaſtity; or to others, as the ſeveral branches of juſtice and charity, comprehended in thoſe general rules, *of loving our neighbour as ourſelves*, and *of doing to others as we would have them to do to us*: there is nothing in all theſe laws but what is moſt

moſt reaſonable, and fit to be done by us; nothing but what, if we were to conſult our own intereſt and happineſs, and did rightly underſtand ourſelves, we would chuſe for ourſelves; nothing but what is eaſy to be underſtood, and as eaſy to be practiſed by an honeſt and a willing mind.

Now, the practice of all theſe is ſuitable to our nature, and agreeable to the frame of our underſtandings; proper to our condition and circumſtances in this world, and preparatory to our happineſs in the next. And no man's reaſon did ever dictate to him the contrary of any of theſe; that it is fit for a creature not to love God, to be undutiful to his great ſovereign, and ungrateful to his beſt benefactor; that it is reaſonable for a man to debauch himſelf by intemperance and brutiſh ſenſuality; to hate, defraud, and oppreſs other men. Our very natural reaſon, if we will but liſten to the dictates of it, is an enemy to all theſe ſins, and a law againſt all theſe vices.

And as the practice of all piety and virtue is agreeable to our reaſon, ſo is it likewiſe for the intereſt of mankind, both of private perſons, and of publick ſocieties, as I have already ſhewn. Some virtues plainly tend to the preſervation of our health, others to the improvement and ſecurity of our eſtates, all to the peace and quiet of our minds; and, which is ſomewhat more ſtrange, to the advancement of our eſteem and reputation. For though the world be generally bad, and men are apt to approve nothing ſo much as what they do themſelves; yet, I know not how it comes to paſs, men are commonly ſo juſt to virtue and goodneſs, as to praiſe it in others even when they do not practiſe it themſelves.

And as for thoſe precepts of Chriſtianity which ſeem to be moſt harſh and difficult at firſt appearance, as repentance and reſtitution, mortification of our luſts and paſſions, humility, patience and contentedneſs with our condition, and reſignation of ourſelves to the will of God, forgiving and loving our enemies, and ſelf-denial for the cauſe of God and religion; if we look well into them, and conſider thoroughly the nature and tendency of them, even theſe will appear to be both reaſonable

able in themſelves, and upon one account or other really for our advantage.

What more reaſonable than repentance; than that a man, when he hath done amiſs, and contrary to his duty, ſhould be heartily ſorry for it, and reſolve to do ſo no more? And how grievous ſoever it be, it is neceſſary, being the only way to pardon and peace. And in caſe our offence againſt God hath been complicated with injury to men, it is but reaſonable we ſhould make reſtitution as far as we are able, according to the nature of the injury. For without this our repentance is not real; becauſe we have not done what we can to undo our fault as much as we can, or at leaſt to hinder the injurious conſequences of it from proceeding any farther: nor can any man be judged to be truly ſorry for his ſin that retains the profit and advantages of it to himſelf. Beſides that till reparation be made to the utmoſt of our power, we can have no peace in our own conſciences, nor any well-grounded hopes of forgiveneſs from God.

Mortification of our luſts and paſſions, though, like repentance, it have ſomething in it that is troubleſome, yet nothing that is unreaſonable, or really to our prejudice. If we give way to our paſſions, we do but gratify ourſelves for the preſent, in order to our future diſquiet; but if we reſiſt and conquer them, we lay the foundation of perpetual peace and tranquillity in our minds. If we govern ourſelves in the uſe of ſenſual delights by the laws of God and reaſon, we ſhall find ourſelves more at eaſe than if we ſhould let looſe the reins to our appetites and luſts: for the more we gratify our luſts, the more craving they will be, and the more impatient of denial. *Creſcit indulgens ſibi dirus hydrops:* "Every luſt is "a kind of hydropick diſtemper; and the more we drink, "the more we ſhall thirſt." So that, by retrenching our inordinate deſires, we do not rob ourſelves of any true pleaſure, but only prevent the pain and trouble of farther diſſatisfaction.

Humility, though it may ſeem to expoſe a man to ſome contempt, yet it is truly the readieſt way to honour; as, on the contrary, pride is a moſt improper and abſurd means for the accompliſhing of the end it aims at. All other vices do in ſome meaſure attain their end. Co-

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vetouſneſs does uſually raiſe an eſtate, and ambitious endeavours do often advance men to high places; but pride, and inſolence, and contempt of others, do infallibly defeat their own deſign. They aim at reſpect and eſteem, but never attain it; for all mankind do naturally hate and flight a proud man.

What more reaſonable than patience and contentedneſs; and that we ſhould in all things reſign up ourſelves to the will of God, who loves us as well as we do ourſelves, and knows what is good for us better than we do ourſelves? This certainly is the beſt way to prevent anxiety and perplexity of mind, and to make the worſt condition as tolerable as it can be, and much more eaſy than it would be otherwiſe.

As for that peculiar law of Chriſtianity which forbids revenge, and commands us to forgive injuries, and to love our enemies, no man can think it grievous who conſiders the pleaſure and ſweetneſs of love, and the glorious victory of overcoming evil with good, and then compares theſe with the reſtleſs torment and perpetual tumults of a malicious and revengeful ſpirit.

And, laſtly, ſelf-denial for the cauſe of God and religion; this is neither unreaſonable, nor to our diſadvantage. If we conſider our infinite obligations to God, we have no reaſon to think much to ſacrifice to him our deareſt intereſts in this world; eſpecially if we conſider withal how diſproportionably great the reward of our ſufferings ſhall be in another world. Beſides that the intereſt of religion is of ſo great concernment to the happineſs of mankind, that every man is bound for that reaſon to aſſert the truth of it with the hazard of any thing that is moſt valuable to him in this world.

II. We are not deſtitute of ſufficient power and ſtrength for the performing of God's commands. Had God given us laws, but no power to keep them, his commandments would then indeed have been grievous. It is true, we have contracted a great deal of weakneſs and impotency by our wilful degeneracy from goodneſs; but that grace which the goſpel offers to us for our aſſiſtance is ſufficient for us. And this ſeems to be the particular reaſon why the Apoſtle ſays here in the text, that *his commandments are not grievous*; becauſe he offers us an aſſiſtance

assistance proportionable to the difficulty of his commands, and the necessity of our condition: for it follows immediately after the text, *For whosoever is born of God, overcometh the world.* Therefore the *commandments* of God *are not grievous;* because every child of God, that is, every Christian, is endued with a power whereby he is enabled to resist and conquer the temptations of the world. The same Apostle elsewhere encourages Christians upon the same consideration: *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* Though we be incompassed with many and potent enemies, who make it their business to tempt and to deter us from our duty; yet our case is not hard, so long as we have a greater strength on our side. And this the Apostle tells us is the case of every Christian: *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world;* 1 John iv. 4. Are there legions of devils who are continually designing and working our ruin? there are also myriads of good angels, who are more chearful and officious to do us good. For I doubt not, but as those who are bent to do wickedly will never want tempters to urge them on, and to push them forward in an evil course; so, on the other hand, those who apply themselves seriously to the business of religion, and yield themselves tractable to good motions, will find the good Spirit of God more ready and active to encourage them than the devil can be to pull them back; unless we think that God hath given a greater power and a larger commission to the devil to do men mischief, than to his Holy Spirit and his holy angels for our assistance and encouragement. But then we are to understand, that this assistance is only offered to men, and not forced upon them whether they will or no. For if we beg God's grace, but neglect to make use of it; if we implore his assistance for the mortifying of our lusts, but will not contribute our own endeavours, God will withdraw his grace, and take away his Holy Spirit from us: nay, if, after we have begun well, we do notoriously slacken our endeavours, we forfeit the divine assistance. If when by God's grace we have in a good measure conquered the first difficulties of religion, and gained some habitual strength against sin; if after this we grow careless and remiss, and neglect our guard, and lay ourselves open

open to temptations, God's Spirit will not always ſtrive with us. Notwithſtanding all the promiſes of the goſpel, and the mighty aſſiſtances there offered to us, if we love any luſt, and will, with Samſon, lay our head in Delilah's lap, we ſhall be inſenſibly robbed of *our ſtrength, and become like other men.*

III. We have the greateſt encouragement to the obſervance of God's commands. Two things make any courſe of life eaſy; preſent pleaſure, and the aſſurance of a future reward. Religion gives part of its reward in hand, the preſent comfort and ſatisfaction of having done our duty; and for the reſt, it offers us the beſt ſecurity that heaven can give. Now, theſe two muſt needs make our duty very eaſy; a conſiderable reward in hand, and not only the hopes, but the aſſurance of a far greater recompence hereafter.

1. Preſent peace and ſatisfaction of mind, and inexpreſſible joy and pleaſure, flowing from the teſtimony of a good conſcience. This is preſent payment, beſides that it is the earneſt of a future and greater happineſs. And this does naturally ſpring up in the mind of a good man: *Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing ſhall offend them.* All acts of piety and virtue are not only delightful for the preſent, but they leave peace and contentment behind them; a peace that no outward violence can interrupt or take from us. The pleaſures of a holy life have, moreover, this peculiar advantage of all worldly joys, that we ſhall never be weary of them; we cannot be cloyed by the frequent repetition of theſe pleaſures, nor by the long enjoyment of them. I know that ſome vices pretend to bring great pleaſure along with them, and that the delights of a ſenſual and voluptuous life make a glorious ſhow, and are attended with much pomp and noiſe; like the ſports of children and fools, which are loud and clamorous; or, as Solomon elegantly compares them, *like the crackling of thorns under a pot*, which makes a little noiſe, and a ſudden blaze, that is preſently over. But the ſerious and the manly pleaſures, the ſolid and ſubſtantial joys, are only to be found in the ways of religion and virtue. The moſt ſenſual man that ever was in the world never felt his heart touched with ſo delicious and laſting a pleaſure,

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as that is which ſprings from a clear conſcience, and a mind fully ſatisfied with its own actions.

2. But the great encouragement of all is, the aſſurance of a future reward; the firm perſuaſion whereof is enough to raiſe us above any thing in this world, and to animate us with courage and reſolution againſt the greateſt difficulties. So the Apoſtle reaſons: *His commandments are not grievous. For whatſoever is born of God, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* The belief of a future happineſs and glory was that which made the primitive Chriſtians ſo victorious over the world, and gave them the courage to reſiſt all the pleaſures and terrors of ſenſe. It cannot be denied, but that a religious courſe of life is liable to be incumbered with many difficulties which are naturally grievous to fleſh and blood. But a Chriſtian is able to comfort himſelf under all theſe with the thoughts of his end, *which is everlaſting life.* He conſiders the goodneſs of God, which he believes would not deny him the free enjoyment of the things of this world, were it not that he hath ſuch joys and pleaſures in ſtore for him as will abundantly recompenſe his preſent ſelf-denial and ſufferings.

Let us now put both theſe together, the pleaſures of religion, and the rewards of it, and they cannot but appear to be a mighty encouragement. With what pleaſure does a man that lives a holy and a virtuous life deſpiſe the pleaſures of ſin, and, notwithſtanding all the allurements of ſenſe, perſiſt reſolutely in his courſe? And how is ſuch a man confirmed in his purpoſe, and animated in his holy reſolution, when he finds that God and his own conſcience do applaud his choice; when all along in the courſe of religion and a virtuous life, in his conflicts with ſin, and reſiſtance of temptations, he hath for his preſent reward the two great pleaſures of innocence and of victory, and for his future encouragement the joyful hopes of a crown and a kingdom? A recompence ſo great, as is ſufficient to make a lame man walk, enough to make any one willing to offer violence to his ſtrongeſt paſſions and inclinations. A man would be content to ſtrive with himſelf, and to conflict with great difficulties, in hopes of a mighty reward. What poor

man would not chearfully carry a great burthen of gold and ſilver, that were aſſured to have the greateſt ſhare of it for his pains, and thereby to be made a man for ever? Whatever difficulties religion is attended withal, they are all ſweetened and made eaſy by the propoſal of a great and eternal reward.

But are there no difficulties then in religion? Is every thing ſo plain and eaſy? Are all the ways of virtue ſo ſmooth and even as we have here repreſented them? Hath not our Saviour told us, that *ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it?* Matth. vii. 14. Does not the Apoſtle ſay, *That through much tribulation we muſt enter into the kingdom of God?* Acts xiv. 22. and *that all that will live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, ſhall ſuffer perſecution?* 2 Tim. iii. 12. And does not the ſcripture every where ſpeak of *ſtriving*, and *wreſtling*, and *running*, and *fighting*; of *labouring*, and *watching*, and *giving all diligence?* And is there nothing grievous in all this?

This is a very material objection, and therefore I ſhall be the more careful to give a ſatisfactory anſwer to it. And that I may do it the more diſtinctly, be pleaſed to conſider theſe ſix things. 1. That the ſuffering of perſecution for religion is an extraordinary caſe, which did chiefly concern the firſt ages of Chriſtianity. 2. That this diſcourſe concerning the eaſineſs of God's commands, does all along ſuppoſe and acknowledge the difficulties of the entrance upon a religious courſe. 3. Nor is there any reaſon it ſhould exclude our after care and diligence. 4. All the difficulties of religion are very much mitigated and allayed by hope and by love. 5. There is incomparably more difficulty and trouble in the ways of ſin and vice, than in the ways of religion and virtue. 6. If we do but put virtue and vice, a religious and a wicked courſe of life, in equal circumſtances; if we will but ſuppoſe a man as much accuſtomed and inured to the one, as he has been to the other: then I ſhall not doubt to pronounce, that the advantages of eaſe and pleaſure will be found to be on the ſide of religion.

1. The ſuffering of perſecution for religion is an extraordinary caſe, and did chiefly concern the firſt ages of Chriſtianity. And therefore the general ſayings of our Saviour

Saviour and his Apoſtles concerning the perſecuted ſtate of Chriſtians, are to be limited, as doubtleſs they were intended, principally to thoſe firſt times, and by no means to be equally extended to all ages of the church. At firſt, indeed, whoever embraced the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, did thereby expoſe themſelves to all the ſufferings which the power and malice of the world could afflict them withal; but ſince *the kingdoms of the earth became the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Chriſt*, and the governors of the world began to be patrons of the church, it is ſo far from being univerſally true that every Chriſtian hath ſuffered the violence of perſecution, that it hath been a rare caſe, and happened only in ſome few ages, and to ſome perſons: ſo that this is accidental to a ſtate of religion, and therefore ought not to be reckoned among the ordinary difficulties of it. And when it happens, God gives extraordinary ſupports, and promiſes mighty rewards to make it tolerable.

2. This diſcourſe concerning the eaſineſs of God's commands, does all along ſuppoſe and acknowledge the difficulties of the firſt entrance upon a religious courſe, except only in thoſe perſons who have had the happineſs to be trained up to religion by the eaſy and inſenſible degrees of a pious and virtuous education. Theſe indeed are freed from a great deal of pains and difficulty, which others who are reclaimed from a bad courſe of life muſt expect to undergo. They are in a great meaſure excuſed from the pangs of the new birth, from the pains of a ſudden and violent change, from the terrors of an affrighted mind, and from the deep and piercing ſorrows of a more ſolemn repentance. Whereas thoſe who have lived wickedly before, muſt look to meet with a great deal more trouble; becauſe they are put upon changing the whole courſe of their life at once, and muſt contend with inveterate habits, and offer no ſmall violence to themſelves in plucking up thoſe vices which have been rooted in them by long cuſtom and continuance. This indeed is grievous, and muſt needs be ſenſibly painful, like the *plucking out of a right eye*, or the *cutting off a right hand*: for in this caſe a man muſt ſtrive againſt the very bent and inclination of his ſtrongeſt appetites, againſt the tyranny of cuſtom, and the mighty power of

a ſecond nature. But this is no juſt reflexion upon religion; becauſe this does not proceed from the nature of God's laws, but from an accidental indiſpoſition in ourſelves, which religion is apt to remove: and if we will but allow ſome time of trouble and uneaſineſs for the cure, when that is once wrought, the commands of God will be more eaſy and delightful to us than ever our ſins and luſts were.

3. Nor does this exclude our after care and diligence. For when the Apoſtle ſays, that *the commandments of God are not grievous*, he does by no means intend to inſinuate, that they are calculated for ſlothful and lazy perſons, that they are ſo eaſy as to require no induſtry and endeavour on our part: he only aims to prevent a tacit objection, which lies at the bottom of many mens hearts, as if religion were a moſt grievous and intolerable burthen, and there were more trouble, and leſs pleaſure in it, than in any other action of human life. This he utterly denies; but does not hereby intend to exclude ſuch diligence and induſtry as men uſe about other matters. And if I ſhould tell you, that the buſineſs of religion does not require a very vigorous proſecution and great earneſtneſs of endeavour, I ſhould ſpeak quite beſides the holy ſcriptures; which ſo frequently command *ſeeking*, and *ſtriving*, and *labouring*; beſides many other ſuch phraſes, that import diligence and earneſtneſs. And indeed it were unfit that ſo excellent and glorious a reward as the goſpel promiſes, ſhould ſtoop down like fruit upon a full-laden bough, to be plucked by every idle and wanton hand; that heaven ſhould be proſtituted to the lazy deſires and faint wiſhes, to the cheap and ordinary endeavours of ſlothful men. God will not ſo much diſparage eternal life and happineſs, as to beſtow it upon thoſe who have conceived ſo low an opinion of it, as not to think it worth the labouring for. And, ſurely, this is ſufficient to recommend religion to any conſiderate man, if the advantages of it be much greater than of any worldly deſign that we can propound to ourſelves, and the difficulties of it not greater. If the ſame ſeriouſneſs, and induſtry of endeavour, which men commonly uſe, to raiſe a fortune, and advance themſelves in the world, will ſerve to make a man a good man, and to bring

bring him to heaven, what reason hath any man to complain of the hard terms of religion? And I think I may truly say, that usually less than this does it: for God considers our condition in this world, and the pressing necessities of this life; that we are flesh, as well as spirit; and that we have great need of these things; and therefore he allows us to be very sedulous and industrious about them. However, this I am sure of, that if men would be as serious to save their immortal souls, as they are to support these dying bodies; if they would but provide for eternity with the same solicitude and real care as they do for this life; if they would but seek heaven with the same ardour of affection, and vigour of prosecution, as they seek earthly things; if they would but love God as much as many men do the world, and mind godliness as much as men usually do gain; if they would but go to church with as good a will as men ordinarily do to their markets and fairs, and be in as good earnest at their devotions as men commonly are in driving a bargain; if they would but endure some troubles and inconveniencies in the ways of religion, with the same patience and constancy as they can do storms, and foul ways and mischances, when they are travelling about their worldly occasions; if they would but avoid bad company, as men use to do cheaters, and reject the temptations of the devil and the world, as they would do the kind words and insinuations of a man whom they verily believe to have a design to over-reach them: I am confident that such a one could not fail of heaven; and would be much surer of it upon these terms, than any man that doth all the other things could be of getting an estate, or of attaining any thing in this world.

And cannot every man do thus much? All that I have said signifies no more, but that men should use their sincere endeavours. And this surely every man can do; for to use our sincere endeavours, is nothing else, but to do as much as we can; and it is nonsense for any man to deny that he can do as much as he can. And if we would do thus much, we are sure of God's grace and assistance; which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men. But men expect that religion should cost them no pains; that happiness should drop into their

laps, without any deſign and endeavour on their part; and that, after they have done what they pleaſe while they live, God ſhould ſnatch them up to heaven when they die. But though *the commandments of God be not grievous*, yet it is fit to let men know that they are not thus eaſy.

4. All the difficulties of religion are very much allayed and ſweetened by hope and by love. By the hopes of a mighty reward; ſo great as is enough to raiſe us above ourſelves, and to make us break through all difficulties and diſcouragements. And by the love of God, who hath taken all imaginable ways to endear himſelf to us. He gave us our beings; and when we were fallen from that happineſs to which at firſt we were deſigned, he was pleaſed to reſtore us to a new capacity of it, by ſending his only Son into the world to die for us. So that if we have any ſenſe of kindneſs, we cannot but love him who hath done ſo much to oblige us; and if we love him entirely, nothing that he commands will be grievous to us: nay, ſo far from that, that the greateſt pleaſure we are capable of, will be to pleaſe him. For nothing is difficult to love. It will make a man deny himſelf, and croſs his own inclinations, to pleaſure them whom he loves. It is a paſſion of a ſtrange power where it reigns, and will cauſe a man to ſubmit to thoſe things with delight, which in other circumſtances would ſeem grievous to him. Jacob ſerved for Rachel *ſeven years*, and after that *ſeven years more; and they ſeemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her*. Did but the love of God rule in our hearts, and had we as real an affection for him as ſome men have for their friends, there are no ſuch difficulties in religion but what love would conquer; and the ſevereſt parts of it would become eaſy, when they were once undertaken by a willing mind.

5. There is incomparably more trouble in the ways of ſin and vice, than in thoſe of religion and virtue. Every notorious ſin is naturally attended with ſome inconvenience of harm, or danger, or diſgrace; which the ſinner ſeldom conſiders, till the ſin be committed, and then he is in a labyrinth; and, in ſeeking the way out of a preſent inconvenience, he intangles himſelf in more. He is glad to make uſe of indirect arts, and laborious crafts,

crafts, to avoid the conſequence of his faults; and many times is fain to cover one ſin with another; and the more he ſtrives to diſintangle himſelf, the more is he *ſnared in the work of his own hands.* Into what perplexities did David's ſin bring him? ſuch as by all his power and arts he could not free himſelf from. He was glad to commit a greater crime, to avoid the ſhame of a leſs; and could find no other way to conceal his adultery, but by plunging himſelf into the guilt of murder. And thus it is proportionably in all other vices. The ways of ſin are *crooked paths*, full of windings and turnings: but the *way of holineſs* and virtue is a *high-way*, and lies ſo plain before us, that *wayfaring men, though fools, ſhall not err therein*, Iſ. xxxv. 8. There needs no ſkill to keep a man's ſelf true and honeſt, if we will but reſolve to deal juſtly, and to *ſpeak the truth to our neighbour*: nothing in the whole world is eaſier; for there is nothing of artifice and reach required, to enable a man to ſpeak as he thinks, and to do to others as he would be dealt withal himſelf.

And as the ways of ſin are full of intricacy and perplexities, ſo likewiſe of trouble and diſquiet. There is no man that wilfully commits any ſin, but his conſcience ſmites him for it, and his guilty mind is frequently galled with the remembrance of it; but the reflexion upon honeſt and virtuous actions, hath nothing of regret and diſquiet in it. No man's conſcience ever troubled him for not being diſhoneſt; no man's reaſon ever challenged him for not being drunk; no man ever broke his ſleep, or was haunted with fears of divine vengeance, becauſe he was conſcious to himſelf, that he had *lived ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in the world.* But with the ungodly it is not ſo. There is no man that is knowingly wicked, but he is guilty to himſelf; and there is no man that carries guilt about him, but he hath received a ſting into his ſoul, which makes him reſtleſs, ſo that he can never have any perfect eaſe and pleaſure in his mind.

I might have deſcended to particular inſtances, and have ſhewn, how much more troubleſome the practice of every ſin and vice is, than the exerciſe of the contrary grace

grace and virtue. But that would be too large a ſubject to be brought within the limits of a ſingle diſcourſe.

6. Let but virtue and vice, a religious and wicked courſe of life, be put in equal circumſtances; do but ſuppoſe a man to be as much accuſtomed and inured to the one as he has been to the other: and then I doubt not but the advantages of eaſe and pleaſure will be found to be on the ſide of religion. And if we do not put the caſe thus, we make an unequal compariſon: for there is no man but, when he firſt begins a wicked courſe, feels a great deal of regret in his mind; the terrors of his conſcience, and the fears of damnation, are very troubleſome to him. It is poſſible that by degrees a man may harden his conſcience, and, by a long cuſtom of ſinning, may in a great meaſure wear off that tender ſenſe of good and evil which makes ſin ſo uneaſy: but then, if in the practice of a holy life a man may, by the ſame degrees, arrive to far greater peace and tranquillity of mind, than ever any wicked men found in a ſinful courſe; if by cuſtom virtue will come to be more pleaſant than ever vice was, then the advantage is plainly on the ſide of religion. And this is truly the caſe. It is troubleſome at firſt for a man to begin any new courſe, and to do contrary to what he hath been accuſtomed to: but let a man but habituate himſelf to a religious and virtuous life, and the trouble will go off by degrees, and unſpeakable pleaſure ſucceed in the room of it. It is an excellent rule which Pythagoras gave to his ſcholars, *Optimum vitæ genus eligito; nam conſuetudo faciet jucundiſſimum*: "Pitch upon the beſt courſe of life, (reſolve "always to do that which is moſt reaſonable and virtu-"ous), and cuſtom will ſoon render it the moſt eaſy." There is nothing of difficulty in a good life, but what may be conquered by cuſtom, as well as the difficulties of any other courſe; and when a man is once uſed to it, the pleaſure of it will be greater than of any other courſe.

Let no man then decline or forſake religion for the pretended difficulties of it, and lay aſide all care of God's commandments, upon this ſuggeſtion, that they are impoſſible to be kept; for you ſee they are not only poſſible, but eaſy. And thoſe who, upon pretence of the

the trouble and difficulties of religion, abandon themſelves to a wicked courſe of life, may eaſily be convinced, that they take more pains to make themſelves miſerable, than would ſerve to bring them to happineſs. There is no man that is a ſervant to ſin, and a ſlave to any baſe luſt, but might, if he pleaſed, get to heaven with leſs trouble than he goes to hell.

So that, upon conſideration of the whole matter, there is no reaſon why any man ſhould be deterred from a holy and virtuous life, for fear of the labour and pains of it; becauſe every one that is wicked, takes more pains in another way, and is more induſtrious only to a worſe purpoſe. Now, he that can travel in deep and foul ways, ought not to ſay that he cannot walk in fair. He that ventures to run upon a precipice, when every ſtep he takes is with danger of his life and his ſoul, ought not to pretend any thing againſt the plain and ſafe paths of religion; which will entertain us with pleaſure all along in the way, and crown us with happineſs at the end.

SERMON VII.

Of the obligation of Chriſtians to a holy life.

2 TIM. ii. 19.

Let every one that nameth the name of Chriſt depart from iniquity.

THE whole verſe runs thus: *Nevertheleſs, the foundation of God ſtandeth ſure, having this ſeal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Chriſt depart from iniquity.*

In which words the Apoſtle declares to us the terms of the covenant between God and man. For the word θεμέλιος, which is here tranſlated *foundation*, according to the uſual ſignification of it, is likewiſe, as learned men have obſerved, ſometimes uſed for an inſtrument of contract whereby two parties do oblige themſelves mutually

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to each other. And this notion of the word agrees very well with what follows concerning the seal affixed to it; which is very suitable to a covenant, but not at all to a foundation. It is true indeed, as the learned Grotius hath observed, there used anciently to be inscriptions on foundation-stones; and the word σφραγὶς, which we render *seal*, may likewise signify an *inscription*: and then the sense will be very current, thus: *The foundation of God standeth sure, having this inscription.* But it is to be considered, that though σφραγὶς may signify an inscription, yet it is only an inscription upon a seal; which hath no relation to a foundation, but is very proper to a covenant or mutual obligation. And accordingly the seal affixed to this instrument, or covenant between God and man, is, in allusion to the custom of those countries, said to have an inscription on both sides, agreeable to the condition of the persons contracting. On God's part there is this impress or inscription, *The Lord knoweth them that are his*; that is, God will own and reward those that are faithful to him: and on our part, *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

Let every one that nameth the name of Christ; that is, that calls himself a Christian. For to name the name of any one, or to have his name called upon by us, does, according to the use of this phrase among the Hebrews, signify nothing else but to be denominated from him. Thus it is frequently used in the Old Testament; and sometimes in the New: *Do they not blaspheme that worthy name, by the which ye are called?* Jam. ii. 7.; that is, the name or title of Christians. And that expression, *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ*, 1 Pet. iv. 14. is at the 16th verse varied, *If any man suffer as a Christian.* So that to name the name of Christ is to call ourselves Christians.

Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. The word ἀδικία is often taken strictly, for injustice or unrighteousness; but sometimes used more largely, for sin and wickedness in the general. And so it seems to be used here in the text; because there is no reason from the context to restrain it to any particular kind of sin or vice, and because Christianity lays an equal obligation upon men to abstain from all sin. *Let every*

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one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity; that is, every Christian obligeth himself by his profession to renounce all sin, and to live a holy life. In speaking to this argument I shall do these two things.

1. Shew what obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives.

2. Endeavour to persuade those who call themselves Christians to answer this obligation.

1. What obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives. He that calls himself a Christian, professeth to entertain the doctrine of Christ, to live in the imitation of his holy example, and to have solemnly engaged himself to all this. I shall speak briefly to these; and then come to that which I principally intend, to persuade men to live accordingly.

1. He that professeth himself a Christian, professeth to entertain the doctrine of Christ, to believe the whole gospel; to assent to all the articles of the Christian faith, to all the precepts, and promises, and threatenings of the gospel. Now, the great design, the proper intention of this doctrine, is, to take men off from sin, and to direct and encourage them to a holy life. It teacheth us what we are to believe concerning God and Christ; not with any design to entertain our minds with the bare speculation of those truths, but to better our lives. For every article of our faith is a proper argument against sin, and a powerful motive to obedience. The whole history of Christ's appearance in the world, all the discourses and actions of his life, and the sufferings of his death, do all tend to this. The ultimate issue of all is, the destroying of sin. So St. John tells us: *For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil*, 1 John iii. 8. But this is most expressly and fully declared to us, Tit. ii. 11. 12. 13. 14. *The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

The precepts of the gospel do strictly command holiness,

neſs, and that univerſal; the purity of our ſouls, and the chaſtity of our bodies; *to cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit*, 2 Cor. vii. 1.; *to abſtain from all kind of evil*, 1 Theſſ. v. 22.; *to be holy in all manner of converſation*, 1 Pet. i. 15. They require us to endeavour after the higheſt degrees of holineſs that are attainable by us in this imperfect ſtate; *to be holy, as he that hath called us is holy; to be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect*, Matth. v. 48.

And all the promiſes of the goſpel are ſo many encouragements to obedience and a holy life: *Having therefore theſe promiſes, let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of God*, 2 Cor. vii. 1. We are told by St. Peter, that theſe exceeding great and precious promiſes are given to us, that by theſe *we might be partakers of a divine nature, having eſcaped the pollution that is in the world through luſt*: and that we might *give all diligence to add to our faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance, and patience, and brotherly kindneſs, and charity*, 2 Pet. i. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.

And the threatenings of the goſpel are ſo many powerful arguments againſt ſin.

Therefore the Apoſtle calls the goſpel *the power of God unto ſalvation*; becauſe therein *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men*, Rom. i. 16. 18. So that if we call ourſelves Chriſtians, we profeſs to embrace the holy doctrine of the Chriſtian religion; which is perfectly oppoſite to all impiety, and wickedneſs of life. We profeſs to be governed by thoſe laws which do ſtrictly injoin holineſs and virtue. We profeſs to be perſuaded, that all the promiſes and threatenings of the goſpel are true, which offer ſuch great and glorious rewards to obedience, and threaten tranſgreſſion and diſobedience with ſuch dreadful puniſhments. And if ſo, we are obliged both by our reaſon and our intereſt to live accordingly.

2. He that profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian, profeſſeth to live in the imitation of Chriſt's example, and to follow his ſteps; *who did no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth*. The Son of God came into the world, not only by his doctrine to inſtruct us in the way to happineſs, and

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by his death to make expiation of ſin; but by his life to be an example to us of holineſs and virtue. Therefore in ſcripture we find ſeveral titles given him which import his exemplarineſs, as of a *Prince* and a *Captain*, a *Maſter* and a *Guide*. Now, if he be our pattern, we ſhould endeavour to be like him; *to have the ſame mind that was in Chriſt Jeſus; to walk in love, as he alſo hath loved us, and given himſelf for us.* We ſhould aſpire after the higheſt degree of holineſs; make it our conſtant and ſincere endeavour to pleaſe God, and do his will, and *to fulfil all righteouſneſs*, as he did. Does any man profeſs himſelf a Chriſtian, and yet abandons himſelf to intemperance and filthy luſts? is this like our Saviour? Are we cruel and unmerciful? is this like the High Prieſt of our profeſſion? Are we proud and paſſionate, malicious and revengeful? is this to be like-minded with Chriſt, who was meek and lowly in ſpirit, who prayed for his enemies, and offered up his blood to God on the behalf of them that ſhed it? If we call ourſelves Chriſtians, we profeſs to have the life of Chriſt continually before us, and to be always correcting and reforming our lives by that pattern.

3. He that calls himſelf a Chriſtian, hath ſolemnly engaged himſelf to renounce all ſin, and to live a holy life. By baptiſm we have ſolemnly taken upon us the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and engaged ourſelves to renounce the devil and all his works, and obediently to keep God's commandments. Anciently thoſe who were baptized, put off their garments, which ſignified the putting off the body of ſin; and were immerſed and buried in the water, to repreſent their death to ſin; and then did riſe up again out of the water, to ſignify their entrance upon a new life. And to theſe cuſtoms the Apoſtle alludes when he ſays, *How ſhall we that are dead to ſin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that ſo many of us as were baptized into Jeſus Chriſt, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptiſm into death: that like as Chriſt was raiſed up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even ſo we alſo ſhould walk in newneſs of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeneſs of his death, we ſhall be alſo in the likeneſs of his reſurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of ſin might be deſtroyed, that henceforth we*

ſhould not ſerve ſin, Rom. vi. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. So that by baptiſm we profeſs to be entered into a new ſtate, and to be endued with a new nature; *to have put off the old man with his deeds*; to have quitted *our former converſation, which is corrupt according to the deceitful luſts*; and to be *renewed in the ſpirit of our minds*, and to have *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*. And therefore baptiſm is called the *putting on of Chriſt*: *As many of you as have been baptized into Chriſt, have put on Chriſt*, Gal. iii. 27. Now, if we profeſs to have put on Chriſt, we muſt quit and renounce our luſts; becauſe theſe are inconſiſtent; as appears by the oppoſition which the Apoſtle makes between them: *Put ye on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and make not proviſion for the fleſh, to fulfil the luſts thereof*, Rom. xiii. 14.

And as we did ſolemnly covenant with God to this purpoſe in baptiſm, ſo we do ſolemnly renew this obligation ſo often as we receive the bleſſed ſacrament of Chriſt's body and blood. Therefore the cup in the ſacrament is called the *new covenant in his blood*; that is, this repreſents the ſhedding of Chriſt's blood; by which rite the covenant between God and Man is ratified. And as by this God doth confirm his promiſes to us, ſo we do oblige ourſelves to be faithful and obedient to him: *And if we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth*, that is, after we are become Chriſtians, *we account the blood of the covenant a common thing*; that is, we make nothing of the ſolemneſt rite that ever was uſed in the world for confirmation of any covenant, the ſhedding of the blood of the Son of God. And that this was always underſtood to be the meaning of this holy ſacrament, to renew our covenant with God, and ſolemnly to confirm our reſolutions of a holy life, is very plain from that account which Pliny gives us of the worſhip of the Chriſtians in a letter to Trajan the Emperor; in which he tells him, "That they aſſembled early in the "morning before day, to ſing a hymn to Chriſt as God. "And then (ſaith he) they do *(ſacramento ſe obſtringere)* "bind themſelves by a ſacrament or oath, not to rob or "ſteal, or commit adultery; not to break their word, "or falſify their truſt; and after they have eaten toge- "ther, they depart home," *Plin. ep. lib.* 10. *ep.* 97. Which

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is plainly an account of the Chriſtians celebrating of the holy ſacrament, which it ſeems was then looked upon as an oath whereby Chriſtians did ſolemnly covenant and engage themſelves againſt all wickedneſs and vice.

Thus you ſee what obligation the profeſſion of Chriſtianity lays upon us to holineſs of life. From all which it is evident, that the goſpel requires ſomething on our part. For the covenant between God and us is a mutual engagement; and as there are bleſſings promiſed on his part, ſo there are conditions to be performed on ours. And if we live wicked and unholy lives, if we neglect our duty towards God, we have no title at all to the bleſſings of this covenant. The contrary doctrine to this hath been greedily entertained, to the vaſt prejudice of Chriſtianity, as if in this new covenant of the goſpel God took all upon himſelf, and required nothing, or as good as nothing, of us; that it would be a diſparagement to the freedom of God's grace, to think he expects any thing from us; that the goſpel is all promiſes, and our part is only to believe and embrace them; that is, to be confident that God will perform them, if we can but think ſo, though we do nothing elſe: which is an eaſy condition to fools, but the hardeſt in the world to a wiſe man; who, if his ſalvation depended upon it, could never perſuade himſelf to believe, that the holy God, without any reſpect at all to his repentance and amendment, would beſtow upon him forgiveneſs of ſins, and eternal life, only becauſe he was confident that God would do ſo; as if any man could think that it were a thing ſo highly acceptable to God, that men ſhould believe of him, that he loves to diſpenſe his grace and mercy upon the moſt unfit and unreaſonable terms. A covenant does neceſſarily imply a mutual obligation; and the ſcripture plainly tells us what are the terms and conditions of this covenant, both on God's part and ours, namely, that he *will be our God*, and we *ſhall be his people*. But he hath no where ſaid, that though we be not his people, yet he will be our God. The ſeal of this covenant hath two inſcriptions upon it; one on God's part, that he *will know them that are his*; and another on our part, that we ſhall *depart from iniquity*. But if we will not ſubmit to this condition, God will not know us; but will bid

us depart from him. So our Saviour tells us: *I will ſay unto them, Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity: I know you not*, Matth. vii. 23. If we deal falſely in covenant with God, and break looſe from all our engagements to him, we releaſe God from all the promiſes that he hath made to us. If we neglect to perform thoſe conditions upon which he hath ſuſpended the performance of his promiſes, we diſcharge the obligation on God's part; and he remains faithful, though he deny us that happineſs which he promiſed under thoſe conditions which we have neglected.

II. I come now to the ſecond thing propounded; and that is, to perſuade thoſe who profeſs Chriſtianity, to anſwer thoſe obligations to a holy life which their religion lays upon them. We all call ourſelves Chriſtians, and would be very much offended at any man that ſhould deny us this title. But let us not cheat ourſelves with an empty and inſignificant name; but, if we will call ourſelves Chriſtians, let us fill up this great title, and make good our profeſſion, by a ſuitable life and practice. And, to perſuade us hereto, I will urge theſe three conſiderations.

1. The indecency of the contrary.

2. The great ſcandal of it to our bleſſed Saviour, and his holy religion. And,

3. The infinite danger of it to our own ſouls.

1. Conſider how unbecoming it is for a man to live unſuitably to his profeſſion. If we call ourſelves Chriſtians, we profeſs to entertain the doctrine of the goſpel; to be taught and inſtructed by the beſt maſter; to be the diſciples of the higheſt and moſt perfect inſtitution that ever was in the world; to have embraced a religion which contains the moſt exact rules for the conduct and government of our lives, which lays down the plaineſt precepts, ſets before us the beſt patterns and examples of a holy life, and offers us the greateſt aſſiſtances and encouragements to this purpoſe. We profeſs to be furniſhed with the beſt arguments to excite us to holineſs and virtue; to be awed with the greateſt fears, and animated with the beſt hopes of any men in the world.

Now, whoever makes ſuch a profeſſion as this, obligeth himſelf to live anſwerably, to do nothing that ſhall groſsly

grosly contradict it. Nothing is more absurd, than for a man to act contrary to his profession; to pretend to great matters, and perform nothing of what he pretends to. Wise men will not be caught with pretences, nor be imposed upon with an empty profession; but they will inquire into our lives and actions, and by these they will make a judgment of us. They cannot see into our hearts, nor pry into our understandings, to discover what it is that we inwardly believe; they cannot discern those secret and supernatural principles that we pretend to be acted by: but this they can do, they can examine our actions, and behold our good or bad works; and try whether our lives be indeed answerable to our profession, and do really excel the lives of other men who do not pretend to such great things. There are a great many sagacious persons who will easily find us out; will look under our mask, and see through all our fine pretensions, and will quickly discern the absurdity of telling the world that we believe one thing, when we do the contrary.

If we profess to believe the Christian religion, we expose ourselves to the scorn and contempt of every discerning man, if we do not live up to it. With what face can any man continue in the practice of any known sin, that professeth to believe the holy doctrine of the gospel, which forbids all sin, under the highest and severest penalties? If we did but believe the history of the gospel as we do any ordinary credible story, and did we but regard the laws of Christianity as we do the laws of the land; were we but persuaded, that fraud and oppression, lying and perjury, intemperance and uncleanness, covetousness and pride, malice and revenge, the neglect of God and religion, will bring men to hell, as certainly as treason and felony will bring a man under the sentence of the law; had we but the same awe and regard for the threatenings and promises of the gospel, that we have for the frowns and smiles of those who are in power and authority: even this would be effectual to keep us from sin. And if the gospel have not this effect upon us, it is an argument that we do not believe it.

It is to no purpose to go about to persuade men, that we do heartily entertain the doctrine of Christ; that doctrine which hath all the characters of piety and justice,

of holineſs and virtue upon it; which obligeth men to *whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are chaſte, whatſoever things are lovely, and of good report*, if we have no regard to theſe things in our lives. He that would know what a man believes, let him attend rather to what he does than to what he talks. He that leads a wicked life, makes a more credible and effectual profeſſion of infidelity, than he who in words only denies the goſpel. It is the hardeſt thing in the world to imagine, that that man believes Chriſtianity, who, by ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, does deny and renounce it. If we profeſs ourſelves Chriſtians, it may juſtly be expected from us, that we ſhould evidence this by our actions; that we ſhould live at another rate than the Heathens did; that we who worſhip a holy and juſt God, ſhould not allow ourſelves the liberty to ſin, as thoſe did who worſhipped ſuch gods as were examples of ſin, and patrons of their vices. Thou who profeſſeſt thyſelf a Chriſtian, mayeſt not walk in the luſts of the fleſh, and of uncleanneſs, as thoſe did who worſhipped a luſtful Jupiter, and a wanton Venus; thou mayeſt not be intemperate, as thoſe were who worſhipped a drunken Bacchus; thou mayeſt not be cruel and unmerciful, as thoſe were who worſhipped a fierce Saturn; nor mayeſt thou ſteal, as thoſe did who worſhipped a thieviſh Mercury. Thou muſt remember that thou art a Chriſtian; and when thou art ready to debaſe thyſelf to any vile luſt, conſider what title thou beareſt, by what name thou art called, whoſe diſciple thou art; and then ſay to thyſelf, Shall I allow myſelf in any impiety, or wickedneſs of life, who pretend to be inſtructed by that grace of God which teaches men to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts? ſhall I cheriſh any ſinful paſſion, who pretend to have mortified all theſe, and to have *put off the old man with his deeds?*

It is not being gilded over with the external profeſſion of Chriſtianity that will avail us; our religion muſt be a vital principle, inwardly to change and transform us. What the Apoſtle ſays concerning circumciſion, Rom. ii. 25. we may apply to them that are baptized, and make an outward profeſſion of Chriſtianity: Baptiſm *verily profiteth*, if we obey the goſpel; but if we walk contrary

trary to the precepts of it, our baptiſm is no baptiſm, and our Chriſtianity is Heatheniſm. If by our lives and actions we do contradict that religion which we profeſs, we do by this very thing prove ourſelves to be counterfeits and hypocrites; and that we have only taken up our religion for a faſhion, and received it according to cuſtom; we were born in a country where it is reverenced, and therefore we are of it. And the reaſon why we are Chriſtians, rather than Jews, or Turks, or Heathens, is, becauſe Chriſtian religion had the fortune to come firſt in our way, and to beſpeak us at our entrance into the world.

Are we not aſhamed to take up a profeſſion upon ſuch ſlight grounds, and to wear about us ſuch an empty title? It ſhould make our blood to riſe in our faces, to conſider what a diſtance there is between our religion and our lives. I remember Tully upbraids the philoſophers very ſmartly for living unſuitably to their doctrines. A philoſopher (ſaith he) is unpardonable if he miſcarry in his life; *quòd in officio cujus magiſter eſſe vult, labitur; artemque vitæ profeſſus, delinquit in vita:* "Becauſe he is "faulty in that wherein he pretends to be a maſter; "and whilſt he profeſſeth an art of living better than "other men, he miſcarries in this life." With how much greater reaſon may we challenge Chriſtians for the miſcarriages of their lives, which are ſo directly contrary to their profeſſion? It may be juſtly expected, that ſo perfect an inſtitution as the goſpel is, which the Son of God came from heaven on purpoſe to propagate in the world, ſhould make men more ſtrictly holy and virtuous, and ſet the profeſſors of it at a greater diſtance from all impurity and vice, than ever any inſtitution in the world did. If a man profeſs any other art or calling, it is expected that he ſhould be ſkilled in it, and excel thoſe who do not pretend to it. It is the greateſt diſparagement to a phyſician that can be, to ſay of him, That he is in other reſpects an excellent man, only he hath no great ſkill in diſeaſes, and the methods of cure; becauſe this is his profeſſion. He might be pardoned for other defects; but the proper ſkill of his art may juſtly be expected from him. So for a Chriſtian, to ſay of him, The worſt thing in him, is his life: he is very orthodox

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in his opinions; but he is an ill-natured man, one of very violent passions; he will be very frequently drunk; he makes no conscience of his dealings; he is very uncharitable to all that differ from him: this man is faulty in his profession; he is defective in that which should be his excellency. He may have orthodox opinions in religion; but, when all is done, there is no such error, and heresy, nothing so fundamentally opposite to religion, as a wicked life. A Christian does not pretend to have a better wit, or a more piercing understanding, than a Turk or Heathen: but he professeth to live better than they; to be more chaste and more temperate, more just and charitable, more meek and gentle, more loving and peaceable, than other men. If he fail in this, where is the art the man boasts of? to what purpose is all this noise and stir about the gospel, and the holy doctrine of Christ? If any man profess himself a Christian, and do not live better than others, he is a mere pretender and mountebank in religion; he is a bungler in his own art, and unskilled in his proper profession. This is the first, the indecency of the thing.

2. Consider how great a scandal this must needs be to our blessed Saviour, and his holy religion. The Christian religion hath undergone many a hard censure for the miscarriages of the professors of it. The impieties and vices of those who call themselves Christians have caused many sharp reflexions upon Christianity, and made the Son of God, and the blessed Saviour of the world, to wear the odious names of deceiver and impostor. If a man did design to do the greatest spite to religion, he could not give it a deeper wound; he could not take a more effectual course to disparage it, than by a lewd and debauched life. For this will still be an objection in the minds of those who are strangers and enemies to our religion: If the gospel were so excellent an institution as it is reported to be, surely we should see better effects of it in the lives of those who profess it. When we would persuade a Heathen to our religion, and tell him how holy a God we serve, what excellent patterns we imitate, what spiritual and divine precepts of holiness and virtue our religion does contain; may not he reply, Would you have me to believe you, when I see

you

you do not believe yourſelves? If you believed your religion, you would live according to it. For if the goſpel were every word of it falſe, if there were neither a heaven to be hoped for, nor a hell to be feared after this life, how could many Chriſtians live worſe than they do?

As we would not proclaim to the world, that the goſpel is an unholy and vitious inſtitution, let us take heed that we bring no ſcandal upon it by our lives, leſt the enemies of our religion ſay, as Salvian tells us they did in his time, *Si Chriſtus ſancta docuiſſet, Chriſtiani ſanctè vixiſſent:* Surely, "if Chriſt had taught ſo holy a do-"ctrine, Chriſtians would have lived holier lives." Tully tells us, that one of the ſhrewdeſt arguments that ever was brought againſt philoſophy was this, *Quoſdam perfectos philoſophos turpiter vivere;* "That ſome great "philoſophers led very filthy lives." Celſus and Porphyry, Hierocles and Julian, among all their witty invectives againſt Chriſtian religion, have nothing againſt it that reflects ſo much upon it, as do the wicked lives of ſo many Chriſtians. The greateſt enmity to religion, is, to profeſs it, and to live unanſwerably to it.

This conſideration ought greatly to affect us. I am ſure the Apoſtle ſpeaks of it with great paſſion and vehemency: *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the croſs of Chriſt; whoſe end is deſtruction, whoſe God is their belly, whoſe glory is in their ſhame, who mind earthly things,* Phil. iii. 18. 19. A Jew or a Turk is not ſo great an enemy to Chriſtianity as a lewd and vitious Chriſtian. Therefore let me beſeech Chriſtians, as they tender the honour of their Saviour, and the credit of their religion, that they would conform their lives to the holy precepts of Chriſtianity. And if there be any who are reſolved to continue in a vitious courſe, to the injury and diſparagement of Chriſtianity, I could almoſt intreat of them, that they would quit their profeſſion, and renounce their baptiſm; that they would lay aſide their title of Chriſtians, and initiate themſelves in Heatheniſh rites and ſuperſtitions, or be circumciſed for Jews, or Turks: for it were really better, upon ſome accounts, that ſuch men ſhould abandon their profeſſion, than keep on a vizard, which

which ſerves to no other purpoſe, but to ſcare others from religion.

3. and laſtly, Let us conſider the danger we expoſe ourſelves to, by not living anſwerably to our religion. And this, I hope, may prevail upon ſuch as are not moved by the former conſiderations. Hypocrites are inſtanced in ſcripture, as a ſort of ſinners that ſhall have the ſharpeſt torments, and the fierceſt damnation. When our Saviour would ſet forth the great ſeverity of the Lord towards the evil ſervant, he expreſſeth it thus: *He ſhall cut him in ſunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites*, Matth. xxiv. 51. So that the puniſhment of hypocrites ſeems to be made the meaſure and ſtandard of the higheſt puniſhment. Thou profeſſeſt to believe in Chriſt, and to hope in him for ſalvation; but in the mean time thou liveſt a wicked and unholy life: thou doſt not believe, but preſume on him; and wilt find, at the great day, that this thy confidence will be thy confuſion, and he whom thou hopeſt will be thy Advocate and Saviour, will prove thy accuſer, and thy judge. What our Saviour ſays to the Jews, *There is one that accuſeth you, even Moſes, in whom ye truſt*, John v. 45. may very well be applied to falſe Chriſtians, There is one that accuſeth you, and will condemn you, even Jeſus, in whom ye truſt.

The profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and mens having the name of Chriſt named upon them, will be ſo far from ſecuring them from hell, that it will ſink them the deeper into it. Many are apt to pity the poor Heathens, who never heard of the name of Chriſt, and ſadly to condole their caſe: but, as our Saviour ſaid upon another occaſion, *Weep not for them; weep for yourſelves.* There is no ſuch miſerable perſon in the world as a degenerate Chriſtian; becauſe he falls into the greateſt miſery, from the greateſt advantages and opportunities of being happy. Doſt thou lament the condition of Socrates, and Cato, and Ariſtides, and doubt what ſhall become of them at the day of judgment? and canſt thou who art an impious and profane Chriſtian, think that thou ſhalt eſcape the damnation of hell?

Doſt thou believe that the moral Heathen ſhall be caſt out? and canſt thou who haſt led a wicked life under the

the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, have the impudence to hope, that thou ſhalt ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God? No: Thoſe ſins which are committed by Chriſtians under the enjoyment of the goſpel, are of deeper dye, and clothed with blacker aggravations, than the ſins of Heathens are capable of. A Pagan may live without God in the world, and be unjuſt towards men, at a cheaper rate, and upon eaſier terms, than thou who art a Chriſtian. Better had it been thou hadſt never known one ſyllable of the goſpel, never heard of the name of Chriſt, than that, having taken it upon thee, thou ſhouldſt not *depart from iniquity*. Happy had it been for thee that thou hadſt been born a Jew, or a Turk, or a poor Indian, rather than that, being bred among Chriſtians, and profeſſing thyſelf of that number, thou ſhouldſt lead a vitious and unholy life.

I have inſiſted the longer upon theſe arguments, that I might, if poſſible, awaken men to a ſerious conſideration of their lives, and perſuade them to a real reformation of them; that I may oblige all thoſe who call themſelves Chriſtians, to live up to the eſſential and fundamental laws of our religion; to love God, and to love our neighbour; to do to every man as we would have him to do to us; to mortify our luſts, and ſubdue our paſſions, and ſincerely to endeavour to grow in every grace and virtue; and to abound in all the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt, to the praiſe and glory of God.

This indeed would become our profeſſion, and be honourable to our religion, and would remove one of the greateſt obſtacles to the progreſs of the goſpel. For how can we expect that the doctrine of God our Saviour ſhould gain any conſiderable ground in the world, ſo long as, by the unworthy lives of ſo many Chriſtians, it is repreſented to the world at ſo great diſadvantage? If ever we would have Chriſtian religion effectually recommended, it muſt be by the holy and unblameable lives of thoſe who make profeſſion of it. Then indeed it would look with ſo amiable a countenance, as to invite many to it; and carry ſo much majeſty and authority in it, as to command reverence from its greateſt enemies,

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and make men to acknowledge that God is in us of a truth, and to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

The good God grant, that as we have taken upon us the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, ſo we may be careful ſo to live, that we may *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things:* that *the grace of God, which bringeth ſalvation, may teach us to deny ungodlineſs, and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world; looking for that bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.* To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, *&c.*

SERMON VIII.

Of the happineſs of a heavenly converſation.

PHIL. iii. 20.

For our converſation is in heaven.

FOR the underſtanding of which words we need to look back no farther than the 18th verſe of this chapter, where the Apoſtle with great vehemency and paſſion ſpeaks of ſome among the Philippians, who indeed profeſſed Chriſtianity, but yet would do any thing to decline ſuffering for that profeſſion: *There are many that walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the croſs of Chriſt;* they cannot endure to ſuffer with him and for him; they are ſo ſenſual, and wedded to this world, that they will do any thing to avoid perſecution. So he deſcribes them in the next verſe: *Whoſe end is deſtruction, whoſe god is their belly, whoſe glory is in their ſhame, who mind earthly things.* Now, in oppoſition to theſe ſenſual and earthly-minded men, the Apoſtle gives us the character of the true Chriſtians: They are ſuch as mind heaven and another world, and prefer the hopes of

of that to all the intereſts of this life: *Our converſation is in heaven.*

For the right underſtanding of which phraſe, be pleaſed to obſerve, that it is an alluſion to a city or corporation, and to the privileges and manners of thoſe who are free of it. And heaven is ſeveral times in ſcripture repreſented to us under this notion of a city. It is ſaid of Abraham, that *he looked for a city which hath foundations, whoſe builder and maker is God*, Heb. xi. 10. It is called likewiſe *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jeruſalem*, Heb. xii. 22. And the ſame Apoſtle, ſpeaking of the uncertain condition of Chriſtians in this world, ſays of them, that *here they have no continuing city, but look for one that is to come*, Heb. xiii. 14.

Now to this city the Apoſtle alludes here in the text, when he ſays, *Our converſation is in heaven:* for the word πολίτευμα, which is rendered *converſation*, may either ſignify the *privilege* of citizens, or their *converſation* and manners; or may take in both theſe.

In the firſt ſenſe, of the privilege of citizens, we find πολιτεία, a word of near affinity with this, ſometimes uſed: *With a great ſum* (ſays the Captain to Paul) *obtained I* τὴν πολιτείαν ταύτην, *this freedom*, Acts xxii. 28. According to this ſenſe, ἡμῶν τὸ πολίτευμα may very well be rendered, as Tertullian often does this text, *municipatus noſter, our citizenſhip is in heaven;* an alluſion perhaps, as the learned Dr. Hammond obſerves, to thoſe, who though they were not born at Rome, and it may be lived at a great diſtance from it, had yet *jus civitatis Romanæ*, the privilege of Roman citizens. In like manner the Apoſtle here deſcribes the condition of Chriſtians. It is true, we are born here in this world, and live in it: but we belong to another corporation; we are denizens of another country, and free of that city which is above.

In the other ſenſe, of the converſation of citizens, we find the verb πολιτεύεσθε uſed towards the beginning of this epiſtle: *Let your converſation be as it becometh the goſpel of Chriſt*, Phil. i. 27. And why may not the word πολίτευμα in the text, without any inconvenience, include both theſe? as if the Apoſtle had ſaid, There are ſome that mind earthly things, and are ſo addicted to

them, that, rather than part with them, they will forſake their religion: but, as for us, we conſider, that we are citizens of heaven, and accordingly we converſe and demean ourſelves in this world, as thoſe that are free of another city, and do belong to it.

So that *to have our converſation in heaven* does imply theſe two things.

1. The ſerious thoughts and conſiderations of heaven.

2. The effect which thoſe thoughts ought to have upon our lives.

Theſe two things take up the meaning of my text, and ſhall be the ſubject of the following diſcourſe.

Firſt, The ſerious thoughts and conſiderations of heaven; that is, of the happy and glorious ſtate of good men in another life. And, concerning this, there are two things principally which offer themſelves to our conſideration: 1. The happineſs of this ſtate. 2. The way and means whereby we may come to partake of this happineſs.

I. We will conſider the happineſs of this ſtate. But what, and how great this happineſs is, I am not able to repreſent to you. Theſe things are yet in a great meaſure within the veil, and it does not now fully *appear what we ſhall be*. The ſcriptures have revealed ſo much in general concerning the reality and unſpeakable felicities of this ſtate, as may ſatisfy us for the preſent, and ſerve to inflame our deſires after it, and to quicken our endeavours for the obtaining of it: as, namely, that it is incomparably beyond any happineſs of this world; that it is very great; and that it is eternal; in a word, that it is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine.

1. It is incomparably beyond any happineſs in this world. It is free from all thoſe ſharp and bitter ingredients which do abate and allay the felicities of this life. All the enjoyments of this world are mixed, and uncertain, and unſatisfying: nay, ſo far are they from giving us ſatisfaction, that the very ſweeteſt of them are ſatiating and cloying.

None of the comforts of this life are pure and unmixed. There is ſomething of vanity mingled with all our earthly enjoyments, and that cauſeth *vexation of ſpirit*.

rit. There is no ſenſual pleaſure, but is either purchaſed by ſome pain, or attended with it, or ends in it. A great eſtate is neither to be got without care, nor kept without fear, nor loſt without trouble. Dignity and greatneſs is troubleſome almoſt to all mankind; it is commonly uneaſy to them that have it, and it is uſually hated and envied by thoſe that have it not. Knowledge, that is one of the beſt and ſweeteſt pleaſures of human life; and yet, if we may believe the experience of one who had as great a ſhare of it as any of the ſons of men ever had, he will tell us, that *this alſo is vexation of ſpirit: for in much wiſdom there is much grief; and he that increaſeth knowledge, increaſeth ſorrow,* Eccl. i. 17. 18.

Thus it is with all the things of this world. The beſt of them have a mixture of good and evil, of joy and ſorrow in them. But the happineſs of the next life is free from allay and mixture. In the deſcription of the new Jeruſalem, it is ſaid, that *there ſhall be no more curſe, and there ſhall be no night there,* Rev. xxii. 3. 5.; nothing to imbitter our bleſſings, or obſcure our glory. Heaven is the proper region of happineſs; there only are pure joys and an unmingled felicity.

But the enjoyments of this world, as they are mixed, ſo they are uncertain. So wavering and inconſtant are they, that we can have no ſecurity of them: when we think ourſelves to have the faſteſt hold of them, they ſlip out of our hands we know not how. For this reaſon Solomon very elegantly calls them things *that are not: Wilt thou ſet thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themſelves wings, and fly like an eagle towards heaven.* So fugitive are they, that, after all our endeavours to ſecure them, they may break looſe from us, and in an inſtant vaniſh out of our ſight. *Riches make to themſelves wings, and fly like an eagle;* intimating to us, that riches are often acceſſory to their own ruin. Many times the greatneſs of a man's eſtate, and nothing elſe, hath been the cauſe of the loſs of it, and of taking away the life of the owner thereof. The fairneſs of ſome mens fortune hath been a temptation to thoſe who have been more powerful, to raviſh it from them. Thus *riches make to themſelves wings.* So that

he that enjoys the greateſt happineſs of this world, does ſtill want one happineſs more, to ſecure to him for the future what he poſſeſſes for the preſent. But the happineſs of heaven is a ſteady and conſtant light, fixed and unchangeable as the fountain from whence it ſprings, *the Father of lights, with whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.*

And if the enjoyments of this life were certain, yet they are unſatisfying. This is the *vanity of vanities*, that every thing in this world can trouble us, but nothing can give us ſatisfaction. I know not how it is, but either we, or the things of this world, or both, are ſo phantaſtical, that we can neither be well with theſe things, nor well without them. If we be hungry, we are in pain; and if we eat to the full, we are uneaſy. If we be poor, we think ourſelves miſerable; and when we come to be rich, we commonly really are ſo. If we are in a low condition, we fret and murmur; and if we chance to get up, and to be raiſed to greatneſs, we are many times farther from contentment than we were before. So that we purſue the happineſs of this world juſt as little children chaſe birds: when we think we are come very near it, and have it almoſt in our hands, it flies farther from us than it was at firſt.

Nay, ſo far are the enjoyments of this world from affording us ſatisfaction, that the ſweeteſt of them are moſt apt to ſatiate and cloy us. All the pleaſures of this world are ſo contrived, as to yield us very little happineſs. If they go off quickly, they ſignify nothing; and if they ſtay long, we are ſick of them. After a full draught of any ſenſual pleaſure, we preſently lothe it, and hate it as much after the enjoyment, as we courted it and longed for it in the expectation. But the delights of the other world, as they will give us full ſatisfaction, ſo we ſhall never be weary of them. Every repetition of them will be accompanied with a new pleaſure and contentment. In the felicities of heaven, theſe two things ſhall be reconciled, which never met together in any ſenſual delight; long and full enjoyment, and yet a freſh and perpetual pleaſure. As in God's *preſence there is fulneſs of joy, ſo at his right hand there ſhall be pleaſures for evermore.*

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2. The happineſs of the other life is not only incomparably beyond any happineſs of this world, (that, it may be, is no great commendation of it), but it is very great in itſelf. The happineſs of heaven is uſually in ſcripture deſcribed to us by ſuch pleaſures as are manly and excellent, chaſte and intellectual; infinitely more pure and refined than thoſe of ſenſe: and if the ſcripture at any time deſcend to the metaphors of a feaſt, and a banquet, and a marriage; it is plainly by way of accommodation to our weakneſs, and condeſcenſion to our capacities.

But the chief ingredients of this happineſs, ſo far as the ſcripture hath thought fit to reveal it to us, are, the perfection of our knowledge, and the height of our love, and the perpetual ſociety and friendſhip of all the bleſſed inhabitants of thoſe glorious manſions; and the joyful concurrence of all theſe in chearful expreſſions of gratitude, in the inceſſant praiſes and admiration of the fountain and author of all this happineſs. And what can be more delightful, than to have our underſtandings entertained with a clear ſight of the beſt and moſt perfect being, with the knowledge of all his works, and of the wiſe deſigns of his providence here in the world? than to live in the reviving preſence of God, and to be continually attending upon him whoſe favour is life, and whoſe glory is much more above that of any of the princes of this world, than the greateſt of them is above the pooreſt worm? The Queen of Sheba thought Solomon's ſervants happy in having the opportunity, by ſtanding continually before him, to hear his wiſdom; but, in the other world, it ſhall be a happineſs to Solomon himſelf, and to the wiſeſt and greateſt perſons that ever were in this world, to ſtand before this great King, to admire his wiſdom, and to behold his glory. Not that I imagine the happineſs of heaven to conſiſt in a perpetual gazing upon God, and in an idle contemplation of the glories of that place: for as by that bleſſed ſight we ſhall be infinitely tranſported, ſo the ſcripture tells us we ſhall be alſo tranſformed into the image of the divine perfections: *We ſhall ſee God, and we ſhall be like him.* And what greater happineſs can there be, than to be like the happieſt and moſt perfect being in the world? Beſides,

who can tell what employment God may have for us in the next life? We need not doubt, but that he who is happineſs itſelf, and hath promiſed to make us happy, can eaſily find out ſuch employments and delights for us in the other world, as will be proper and ſuitable to that ſtate.

But then, beſides the improvement of our knowledge, there ſhall be the moſt delightful exerciſe of love. When we come to heaven, we ſhall enter into the ſociety of the bleſſed angels, and of *the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect*; that is, freed from all thoſe paſſions and infirmities which do now render the converſation, even of the beſt men, ſometimes troubleſome to one another. We ſhall then meet with all thoſe excellent perſons, thoſe brave minds, thoſe innocent and charitable ſouls, whom we have ſeen, and heard, and read of in this world. There we ſhall meet with many of our dear relations and intimate friends, and perhaps with many of our enemies; to whom we ſhall then be perfectly reconciled, notwithſtanding all the warm conteſts and peeviſh differences which we had with them in this world, even about matters of religion. For heaven is a ſtate of perfect love and friendſhip; there will be nothing but kindneſs and good-nature there, and all the prudent arts of endearment, and wiſe ways of rendering converſation mutually pleaſant to one another. And what greater happineſs can be imagined, than to converſe freely with ſo many excellent perſons, without any thing of folly or diſguiſe, of jealouſy or deſign upon one another? For then there will be none of thoſe vices and paſſions, of covetouſneſs and ambition, of envy and hatred, of wrath and peeviſhneſs, which do now ſo much ſpoil the pleaſure and diſturb the quiet of mankind. All quarrels and contentions, ſchiſms and diviſions, will then be effectually hindered; not by force, but by love; not by compulſion, but by that *charity which never fails*: and all thoſe controverſies in religion, which are now ſo hotly agitated, will then be finally determined; not as we endeavour to end them now by canons and decrees, but by a perfect knowledge, and convincing light.

And when this bleſſed ſociety is met together, and thus united by love, they ſhall all join in gratitude to their

their great patrons and benefactors: *To him that ſits upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was ſlain; to God even our Father, and to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who hath loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood.* And they ſhall ſing everlaſting ſongs of praiſe to God, for all his works of wonder, for the effects of that infinite goodneſs, and admirable wiſdom, and almighty power, which are clearly ſeen in the creation and government of the world, and of all the creatures in it: particularly for his favours to mankind; for the benefit of their beings, for the comfort of their lives, and for all his merciful providences towards them in this world; but above all, for the redemption of their ſouls by the death of his Son, for the free forgiveneſs of their ſins, for the gracious aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit, and for conducting them ſafely through all the ſnares and dangers, the troubles and temptations of this world, to the ſecure poſſeſſion of that glory and happineſs which then they ſhall be partakers of, and are bound to praiſe God for to all eternity. This, this ſhall be the employment of the bleſſed ſpirits above; and theſe are the chief ingredients of our happineſs which the ſcripture mentions. And if there were no other, as there may be ten thouſand more for any thing I can tell; yet generous and virtuous minds will eaſily underſtand, how great a pleaſure there is in the improvement of our knowledge, and the exerciſe of love, and in a grateful and perpetual acknowledgment of the greateſt benefits that creatures are capable of receiving.

3. This happineſs ſhall be eternal. And though this be but a circumſtance, and do not enter into the nature of our happineſs; yet it is ſo material a one, that all the felicities which heaven affords would be imperfect without it. It would ſtrangely damp and allay all our joys, to think that they ſhould ſometime have an end. And the greater our happineſs were, the greater trouble it would be to us to conſider that it muſt have a period. It would make a man ſorrowful indeed, to think of leaving ſuch vaſt poſſeſſions. Indeed, if the happineſs of heaven were ſuch as the joys of this world are, it were fit they ſhould be as ſhort; for after a little enjoyment, it would cloy us, and we ſhould ſoon grow weary of it. But being ſo excellent, it would ſcarce be a happineſs if

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it were not eternal. It would imbitter the pleaſures of heaven, as great as they are, to ſee to an end of them, though it were at never ſo great a diſtance; to conſider that all this vaſt treaſure of happineſs would one day be exhauſted, and that after ſo many years were paſt, we ſhould be as poor and miſerable again as we were once in this world. God hath ſo ordered things, that the vain and empty delights of this world ſhould be temporary and tranſient; but that the great and ſubſtantial pleaſures of the other world ſhould be as laſting as they are excellent. For heaven, as it is an *exceeding*, ſo it is *an eternal weight of glory*. And this is that which crowns the joys of heaven, and baniſhes all fear and trouble from the minds of the bleſſed. And thus to be ſecured in the poſſeſſion of our happineſs, is an unſpeakable addition to it. For that which is eternal, as it ſhall never determine, ſo it can never be diminiſhed: for to be diminiſhed, and to decay, is to draw nearer to an end; but that which ſhall never have an end, can never come nearer to it.

O vaſt eternity! how doſt thou ſwallow up our thoughts, and entertain us at once with delight and amazement? This is the very top and higheſt pitch of our happineſs, upon which we may ſtand ſecure, and look down with ſcorn upon all things here below: and how ſmall and inconſiderable do they appear to us, compared with the vaſt and endleſs enjoyments of our future ſtate? But oh vain and fooliſh ſouls that are ſo little concerned for eternity! that for the trifles of time, and *the pleaſures of ſin, which are but for a ſeaſon*, can find in our hearts to forfeit an everlaſting felicity. Bleſſed God! why haſt thou prepared ſuch a happineſs for thoſe who neither conſider it, nor ſeek after it? *Why is* ſuch *a price put into the hands of fools, who have no heart to make uſe of it?* who fondly chuſe to gratify their luſts, rather than to ſave their ſouls; and ſottiſhly prefer the temporary enjoyments of ſin, before a bleſſed immortality?

4. and laſtly, This happineſs is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. It is ſo great, that it cannot now *enter into the heart of man*. We cannot, from the experience of any of thoſe pleaſures and delights which we have been acquainted withal in this world,

world, frame an equal idea and conception of it. So that, when we come to heaven, we ſhall be ready to ſay of it as the Queen of Sheba did of Solomon's wiſdom and proſperity, that *half of it hath not been told us*; that the felicities and glories of that ſtate do far exceed all the fame which we heard of them in this world: for who can ſay how great a good God is? and how happy he, who is the fountain of happineſs, can make thoſe ſouls that love him, and thoſe whom he loves?

In this imperfect ſtate we are not capable of a full repreſentation of thoſe glories: *We cannot now ſee God, and live.* A full deſcription of heaven, and of the pleaſures of that ſtate, would let in joys upon us too big for our narrow capacities, and too ſtrong for weak mortality to bear. *We are now but children, and we ſpeak as children, and underſtand* and think *as children* concerning theſe things; but in the other ſtate we ſhall grow up *to be men*, and then we ſhall *put away* theſe *childiſh* thoughts. *Now we know but in part: but when that which is perfect is come, that which is imperfect ſhall be done away. Now we ſee through a glaſs darkly*, (ἐν αἰνίγματι, *in a riddle*); *but then we ſhall ſee face to face: now we know in part; but then we ſhall know even as alſo we are known*, 1 Cor. xiii. 9. 10. 11. 12. as the Apoſtle diſcourſeth excellently concerning this very matter.

No ſooner ſhall we enter upon the joys of the other world, but our minds ſhall be raiſed to a ſtrength and activity as much above that of the moſt knowing perſons in this world, as the thoughts of the greateſt philoſopher and wiſeſt man upon earth, are above the thoughts of a child or a fool. No man's mind is now ſo well framed to underſtand any thing in this world, as our underſtandings ſhall then be fitted for the knowledge of God, and of the things that belong to that ſtate. In the mean time, let us bleſs God that he hath revealed ſo much of this happineſs to us, as is neceſſary to excite and encourage us to ſeek after it.

II. The ſecond thing to be conſidered concerning our future happineſs, is the way and means whereby we may come to be made partakers of it. And that, in ſhort, is, by the conſtant and ſincere endeavours of a holy life, in and through the mercies of God in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

Chriſt. Chriſt indeed is the author of our ſalvation, but obedience is the condition of it. So the Apoſtle tells us, that Chriſt *is the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*, Heb. v. 9. It is *the grace of God* in the goſpel *which brings* or offers this *ſalvation* to us; but then it is by the *denying of ungodlineſs and worldly luſts*, and by *living ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world*, that we are *to wait for the bleſſed hope*, Tit. ii. 11. 12. Our Saviour promiſes this happineſs to the pure in heart: *Bleſſed are the pure in heart; for they ſhall ſee God.* And elſewhere the ſcripture doth exclude all others from any ſhare or portion in this bleſſedneſs: ſo the Apoſtle aſſures us, *that without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14.

And holineſs is not only a condition, but a neceſſary qualification for the happineſs of the next life. This is the force of St. John's reaſoning, *We ſhall be like him, for we ſhall ſee him.* To *ſee God*, is to be happy; but, unleſs we be like him, we cannot ſee him. The ſight and preſence of God himſelf would be no happineſs to that man who is not like to God in the temper and diſpoſition of his mind. And from hence the Apoſtle infers in the next verſe, *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure.* So that, if we live wicked lives, if we allow ourſelves in the practice of any known ſin, we interrupt our hopes of heaven, and render ourſelves unfit for eternal life. By this means we defeat all the deſigns of God's grace and mercy towards us, and ſalvation itſelf cannot ſave us, if we make ourſelves incapable of that happineſs which God offers. Heaven is in ſcripture called, *an inheritance among them that are ſanctified*, and *the inheritance of the ſaints in light*: ſo that it is not enough that this *inheritance* is promiſed to us, but we muſt be qualified and prepared for it, and *be made meet to be made partakers of it.*

And this life is the time of our preparation for our future ſtate. Our ſouls will continue for ever what we make them in this world. Such a temper and diſpoſition of mind as a man carries with him out of this life, he ſhall retain in the next. It is true indeed, heaven perfects thoſe holy and virtuous diſpoſitions which are begun

gun here; but the other world alters no man as to his main ſtate: *He that is filthy, will be filthy ſtill;* and *he that is unrighteous, will be unrighteous ſtill.* If we do not in a good degree mortify our luſts and paſſions here, death will not kill them for us, but we ſhall carry them with us into the other world. And if God ſhould admit us ſo qualified into the place of happineſs, yet we ſhall bring that along with us, which would infallibly hinder us from being happy. Our ſenſual inclinations and deſires would meet with nothing there that would be ſuitable to them; and we ſhould be perpetually tormented with thoſe appetites which we brought with us out of this world, becauſe we ſhould find nothing there to gratify them withal. For, as the Apoſtle ſays in another ſenſe, *the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, but righteouſneſs, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghoſt.* The happineſs of heaven conſiſts in ſuch things as a wicked man hath no guſt and reliſh for. So that if a covetous, or ambitious, or voluptuous man, were in heaven, he would be juſt like the rich man in hell, tormented with a continual thirſt, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent deſires; and would not be able, amidſt all the plenty and treaſures of that place, to find ſo much as one drop of ſuitable pleaſure and delight to quench and allay that heat. So likewiſe our fierce and unruly paſſions, if we ſhould carry them with us into the other world, how inconſiſtent would they be with happineſs? They would not only make us miſerable ourſelves, but be a trouble to all thoſe with whom we ſhould converſe. If a man of an envious and malicious, of a peeviſh and paſſionate temper, were admitted into the manſions of the bleſſed, he would not only be unhappy himſelf, but would diſturb the quiet of others, and raiſe ſtorms, even in thoſe calm regions. Vain man! that dreameſt of being happy, without any diſpoſition or preparation for it. To be happy, is to enjoy what we deſire, and to live with thoſe whom we love. But there is nothing in heaven ſuitable to the deſires and appetites of a wicked man. All the joys of that place, and the delights of that ſtate, are purely ſpiritual; and are only to be reliſhed by thoſe who have *purified themſelves, as God is pure.* But if thou

thou be carnal and ſenſual, what are theſe things to thee? What happineſs would it be to thee to ſee God, and to have him always in thy view, who was never in all thy thoughts; to be tied to live for ever in his company, who is of a quite contrary temper and diſpoſition to thyſelf, whoſe preſence thou dreadeſt, and whom, whilſt thou waſt in this world, thou couldſt never endure to think upon? So that the pleaſures of heaven itſelf could ſignify no good or happineſs to that man who is not ſo diſpoſed as to take pleaſure in them. Heaven is too pure an air for corrupt ſouls to live and breathe in; and the whole employment and converſation of that place, as it would be unſuitable, ſo would it alſo be unacceptable to a ſenſual and vitious perſon.

From all this it appears, how neceſſary it is for us to prepare ourſelves for this bleſſed ſtate, by the conſtant and ſincere endeavours of a holy life, and by mortifying every luſt and inordinate paſſion in our ſouls: for till this be done, we are not meet to be made partakers of the felicities of the other world. And thus I have done with the firſt thing implied in this phraſe, *of having our converſation in heaven, viz.* the ſerious thoughts and conſiderations of heaven; or the happineſs of that ſtate, and of the way and means whereby that happineſs is to be attained.

Secondly, The *having our converſation in heaven*, does imply likewiſe the effect which thoſe conſiderations ought to have upon our hearts and lives. As,

1. To convince us of the vanity of this world. God hath on purpoſe made this world troubleſome and uneaſy to us, that there might be no ſufficient temptation, to reaſonable and conſiderate men, to take them off from the care and thought of their future happineſs; that God and heaven might have no rival here below; that there might be nothing in this world that might pretend to our affection, or court us with any advantage, in compariſon of everlaſting life and glory.

When we come to die, and eternity ſhall preſent itſelf to our ſerious and waking thoughts, then things will put on another face; and thoſe things which we valued ſo much in this life, will then appear to be nothing worth; but thoſe things which we neglected, to be of infinit

infinite concernment to us, and worthy to have been the care and endeavour of our whole lives. And if we would conſider theſe things in time, while the opportunities of life and health are before us, we might be convinced at a cheaper rate, and come to be ſatisfied of the vanity of this world before we deſpaired of the happineſs of the other.

2. To make us very active and induſtrious to be as good, and to do as much good as we can in this life, that ſo we may be qualified and diſpoſed for the happineſs of the next. Men are uſually very induſtrious for the things of this life, to be rich and great in the world: did we but value heaven half as much as it deſerves, we ſhould take infinitely more pains for that. So often as we conſider the glories that are above, how does it accuſe our ſloth, and condemn our folly, that we are leſs concerned for our ſouls, than moſt men are for their bodies? that we will not labour half ſo much for an eternal inheritance, as men ordinarily do for theſe corruptible things?

Let us remember, that we are haſting apace to another world, and that our eternal happineſs now lies at the ſtake. And how ſhould it quicken our endeavours to have ſuch a reward ſet before us, to have crowns and ſceptres in our eyes? Would we but often repreſent to our minds the glorious things of another world, what fervours ſhould we feel in our hearts? we ſhould be all life, and ſpirit, and wing; and ſhould do God's will, almoſt with the ſame readineſs and delight, as the angels do, *who continually behold the face of their Father.* The conſideration of heaven, and the firm perſuaſion of our future happineſs, ſhould actuate all the powers of our ſouls, and be continually inſpiring us with new vigour in the ways of holineſs and virtue. How ſhould this thought ſwell our reſolutions, and confirm our purpoſes of obedience, that if we have our *fruit unto holineſs*, our *end will be everlaſting life?*

3. To mitigate and lighten the evils and afflictions of this life. It is no great matter how rough the way be, provided we be ſure that it leads to happineſs. The incomparably greater good of the next life will, to a wiſe and conſiderate man, weigh down all the evils of

this. And the ſcripture tells us that there is no compariſon between them: *The ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which ſhall be revealed in us*, Rom. viii. 18. The evils of this life afflict men more or leſs according as the ſoul is fortified with conſiderations proper to ſupport us under them. When we conſider that we have but a little while to be here, that we are upon our journey travelling towards our heavenly country, where we ſhall meet with all the delights we can deſire, it ought not to trouble us much to endure ſtorms and foul ways, and to want many of thoſe accommodations we might expect at home. This is the common fate of travellers; and we muſt take things as we find them, and not look to have every thing juſt to our mind. Theſe difficulties and inconveniencies will ſhortly be over, and after a few days will be quite forgotten, and be to us as if they had never been. And when we are ſafely landed in our own country, with what pleaſure ſhall we look back upon thoſe rough and boiſterous ſeas which we have eſcaped? The more troubles we have paſſed through, the kinder uſage we ſhall find when we come to our Father's houſe. So the Apoſtle tells us, that *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. When we come to heaven, our happineſs ſhall then be as real as our miſeries were here upon earth, and far greater, and more laſting. And what great matter is it though we ſuffer a while in this world, provided we eſcape the endleſs unſufferable torments of the next? though we have not our good things in this life, if infinitely greater be reſerved for us, and we ſhall receive them with intereſt in the other?

Several of the evils and calamities of this life would be inſufferable indeed, if there were nothing better to be hoped for hereafter. If this were true, Chriſtians would not only be of all men, but of all creatures, the moſt miſerable. But our religion hath abundantly aſſured us to the contrary. And the aſſurance of this was that which made the primitive Chriſtians to embrace ſufferings with ſo much chearfulneſs; *to glory in tribulation*, and *to take joyfully the ſpoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a bettter and more enduring ſubſtance.*

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The ſeven brethren, in the hiſtory of the Maccabees, upon this perſuaſion, would *not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better reſurrection.* That ſtorm of ſtones which was poured upon St. Stephen was no more to him than a common ſhower, when *he ſaw the heavens opened,* and *Jeſus* (in whoſe cauſe he ſuffered) *ſtanding on the right hand of God.*

4. To make us ſincere in all our profeſſions, words and actions. Did men firmly believe the rewards of another world, their religion would not be only in ſhew and pretence, but in life and reality; no man would put on a form of godlineſs that were deſtitute of the power of it: we ſhould do nothing for the opinion of others, but all with regard to God and our own conſciences; and be as curious of our thoughts, and moſt retired actions, as if we were in an open theatre, and in the preſence of the greateſt aſſembly. For in the next life men ſhall not be rewarded for what they ſeemed to be, but for what they really were in this world. Therefore whatever we think, or ſpeak, or do, we ſhould always remember that the day of revelation is coming, when the ſecrets of all hearts ſhall be diſcloſed; when all diſguiſes ſhall be laid aſide, and every one's maſk ſhall be taken off; and all our actions and deſigns ſhall be brought upon the publick ſtage, and expoſed to the view of men and angels: *There is nothing* now *hidden which ſhall not* then *be revealed, nor ſecret which ſhall not be made known.*

5. To arm us againſt the fears of death. Death is terrible to nature, and the terror of it is infinitely increaſed by the fearful apprehenſions of what may follow it. But the comfortable hopes of a bleſſed immortality do ſtrangely relieve the fainting ſpirits of dying men, and are able to reconcile us to death, and in a great meaſure to take away the terror of it. I know that the thoughts of death are diſmal even to good men; and we have never more need of comfort and encouragement, than when we are conflicting with this laſt enemy; and there is no ſuch comfortable conſideration to a dying man, as the hopes of a happy eternity. He that looks upon death only as a paſſage to glory, may welcome the meſſengers of it, as bringing him the beſt and moſt joyful news that ever

came to him in his whole life; and no man can ſtay behind in this world with half the comfort that this man leaves it.

And now I have done with the two things implied in this phraſe, of *having our converſation in heaven, viz.* the ſerious thoughts and conſiderations of heaven, and the effect of theſe thoughts and conſiderations upon our hearts and lives.

I crave your patience but a little longer, till I make ſome reflexion upon what hath been delivered concerning the happineſs of good men after this life. I have told you, that it is incomparably beyond any happineſs of this world; that it is great in itſelf, and eternal in its duration, and far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. And now, after all this, I am very ſenſible how much all that I have ſaid comes ſhort of the greatneſs and dignity of the thing. So that I could almoſt begin again, and make a new attempt upon this ſubject. And indeed who would not be loth to be taken off from ſo delightful an argument? Methinks it is good for us to be here, and to let our minds dwell upon theſe conſiderations. We are unworthy of heaven, and unfit to partake of ſo great a glory, if we cannot take pleaſure in the contemplation of thoſe things now, the poſſeſſion whereof ſhall be our happineſs for ever.

With what joy then ſhould we think of thoſe *great and glorious things which God hath prepared for them that love him; of that inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, which fadeth not away, reſerved for us in the heavens?* How ſhould we welcome the thoughts of that happy hour, when we ſhall make our eſcape out of theſe priſons; when we ſhall paſs out of *this howling wilderneſs into the promiſed land*; when we ſhall be removed from all the troubles and temptations of a wicked and ill-natured world; when we ſhall be paſt all ſtorms, and ſecured from all further danger of ſhipwreck, and ſhall be ſafely landed in the regions of bliſs and immortality?

O bleſſed time! when *all tears ſhall be wiped from our eyes*, and *death and ſorrow ſhall be no more*; when *mortality* ſhall *be ſwallowed up of life*, and we ſhall enter upon the poſſeſſion of all that happineſs and glory which God hath promiſed, and our faith hath believed, and

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our hopes have raiſed us to the expectation of; when we ſhall be eaſed of all our pains, and reſolved of all our doubts, and be purged from all our ſins, and be freed from all our fears, and be happy beyond all our hopes, and have all this happineſs ſecured to us beyond the power of time and change; when we ſhall know God and other things without ſtudy, and love him and one another without meaſure, and ſerve and praiſe him without wearineſs, and obey his will without the leaſt reluctancy; and ſhall ſtill be more and more delighted in the knowing, and loving, and praiſing, and obeying of God to all eternity.

How ſhould theſe thoughts affect our hearts, and what a mighty influence ought they to have upon our lives? The great diſadvantage of the arguments fetched from another world is this, that thoſe things are at a great diſtance from us, and not ſenſible to us; and therefore are not apt to affect us ſo ſtrongly, and to work ſo powerfully upon us. Now, to make amends for this diſadvantage, we ſhould often revive theſe conſiderations upon our minds, and inculcate upon ourſelves the reality and certainty of theſe things, together with the infinite weight and importance of them. We ſhould reaſon thus with ourſelves: If good men ſhall be ſo unſpeakably happy, and conſequently wicked men ſo extremely miſerable in another world; if theſe things be true, and will one day be found to be ſo, why ſhould they not be to me as if they were already preſent? why ſhould not I be as much afraid to commit any ſin, as if hell were naked before me, and I ſaw the aſtoniſhing miſeries of the damned? and why ſhould I not be as careful to ſerve God, and keep his commandments, as if heaven were open to my view, and I ſaw Jeſus ſtanding at the right hand of God, with crowns of glory in his hand ready to be ſet upon the heads of all thoſe who continue faithful to him?

The lively apprehenſions of the nearneſs of death and eternity, are apt to make mens thoughts more quick and piercing, and, according as we think ourſelves prepared for our future ſtate, to tranſport us with joy, or to amaze us with horror: for the ſoul that is fully ſatisfied of his future bliſs, is already entered into heaven, has be-

gun to take poſſeſſion of glory, and has, as it were, his bleſſed Saviour in his arms; and may ſay, with old Simeon, *Lord, now letteſt thou thy ſervant depart in peace; for mine eyes have ſeen thy ſalvation.* But the thoughts of death muſt needs be very terrible to that man who is doubtful or deſpairing of his future condition. It would daunt the ſtouteſt man that ever breathed, to look upon death, when he can ſee nothing but hell beyond it. When the apparition at Endor told Saul, *To-morrow, thou and thy ſons ſhall be with me,* theſe words ſtruck him to the heart; ſo that *he fell down to the ground, and there was no more ſtrength left in him.* It is as certain that we ſhall die, as if an expreſs meſſenger ſhould come to every one of us from the other world, and tell us ſo: why ſhould we not then always live as thoſe that muſt die, and as thoſe that hope to be happy after death? To have theſe apprehenſions vigorous and lively upon our minds, this is *to have our converſation in heaven; from whence alſo we look for our Saviour, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; who ſhall change our vile body, that it may be faſhioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power whereby he is able even to ſubdue all things to himſelf.*

SERMON IX.

Of the end of judgments, and the reaſon of their continuance.

ISAIAH ix. 12. 13.

For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill. For the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of hoſts.

IN the former part of the 12th verſe, the Prophet threatens that Iſrael ſhould be brought into great diſtreſs, and be ſet upon by enemies on every ſide, *the Syrians before, and the Philiſtines behind;* and that they ſhould *devour Iſrael with open mouth.* And though this was

was like to be a very ſore and dreadful judgment; yet he foretells, that this would not ſtay God's hand, nor ſatisfy his anger; becauſe he foreſaw, that they would ſtill grow worſe, and continue impenitent: *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill. For the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of hoſts.*

In which words there are theſe two things very uſeful at all times, but at this time eſpecially moſt proper and ſeaſonable for our conſideration.

1. The deſign and intention of God in ſending judgments upon a people; and that is, to reclaim them from their ſins; implied in theſe words, *For the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them:* which intimate to us, that this is the end which God aims at in his judgments, to take us off from our ſins, and to bring us to himſelf.

2. The reaſon of the continuance of God's judgments; becauſe the people were not reclaimed by them. And this is fully expreſſed in the text: that therefore *God's anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill; becauſe the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them,* &c.

Of theſe two I crave leave to ſpeak, as plainly and briefly as I can.

I. The deſign and intention of God in ſending judgments upon a people; and that is, to reclaim them from their ſins. This indeed is the intention of all God's diſpenſations towards us in this world. The end of all his mercies and benefits is, to take us off from ſin, and to oblige and win us to our duty. So the Apoſtle tells us, Rom. ii. 4. that the deſign of God's *goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance towards us,* is *to lead us to repentance.*

And this is the way wherein God delights to deal with us. The way of judgment and ſeverity is that which he is more averſe from; a courſe which he unwillingly takes with us, and not without ſome difficulty and reluctancy. *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men:* and were it not that we are ſuch perverſe creatures, as not to be wrought upon by kindneſs, ſo wild as not to be tamed by gentle uſage, God would not handle us in any other way. It is our obſtinacy and intractableneſs

intractableneſs to the methods of his goodneſs which conſtraineth, and almoſt forceth him againſt his inclination, to take the rod into his hand, and to chaſtiſe us with it. He would draw us *with the cords of love and the bands of a man*, as he expreſſeth himſelf in the Prophet; but we will not follow him: and therefore we provoke him to turn thoſe cords into whips, and to change the gentle methods of his kindneſs into ways of harſhneſs and ſeverity.

And yet, when he comes to take this courſe with us, he ſtill, like a kind and tender-hearted father, aims at our benefit and advantage. He deſigns kindneſs to the ſons of men, by all thoſe judgments which do not kill them, and cut them off from the opportunity and poſſibility of improving them. If he ſends evils upon us, it is that thereby he may do us ſome greater good: if he afflicts us, it is not becauſe it is pleaſant to him to deal harſhly with us, but becauſe it is profitable and neceſſary for us to be ſo dealt with: and if at any time he imbitter our lives by miſeries and ſufferings, it is becauſe he is loth to ſee us periſh in pleaſant ways, and chuſeth rather to be ſomewhat ſevere towards us, than ſuffer us to be utterly undone.

This Moſes declares to have been the great end of all the ſevere providences of God towards the people of Iſrael in their long wandering in the wilderneſs, and all the difficulties and hardſhips they were there exerciſed withal for the ſpace of forty years: Deut. viii. 15. 16. *Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderneſs, wherein were fiery ſerpents and ſcorpions*, &c. *that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.*

So that the afflicting providences of God are not only apt in their own nature to do us good, but, which is a more expreſs argument of the divine goodneſs, God intends and aims at this end by them: he does not ſend judgments upon this theatre of the world for his ſport and paſtime, nor ſet on one part of his creation to bait another for his own diverſion: he does not, like ſome of the cruel Roman Emperors, take pleaſure to exerciſe men with dangers, and to ſee them play bloody prizes before him.

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Nay, he does nothing that is ſevere out of humour and paſſion, as our earthly parents many times do. Indeed he is angry with us for our ſins; but yet ſo as ſtill to pity our perſons: and when his providence makes uſe of any ſharp and cutting inſtruments, it is with this merciful deſign, to let out our corruption; if he caſts us into the furnace of affliction, it is that he may refine and purify us from our droſs.

So that though the judgments of God be evils in themſelves; yet, conſidering the intentions of God in them, they are no real objections againſt his goodneſs, but rather arguments for it; as will appear if we conſider theſe three things.

1. That the judgments of God are proper for the cure of a far greater evil of another kind.

2. They are proper for the prevention of far greater evils of the ſame kind.

3. They are not only proper to theſe ends, but in many caſes very neceſſary.

1. The judgments of God are very proper for the cure of a far greater evil of another kind; I mean, the evil of ſin. We take wrong meaſures of things, when we judge thoſe to be the greateſt evils which afflict our bodies, wound our reputation, and impoveriſh our eſtates. For thoſe certainly are far the greateſt which affect our nobleſt part; which vitiate our underſtandings, and deprave our wills, and wound and defile our ſouls. What corrupt humours are to the body, that ſin is to the ſouls of men; their diſeaſe, and their death.

Now, it is very agreeable with the goodneſs and mercy of the divine providence, to adminiſter to us whatever is proper for the cure of ſo great an evil. If we make ourſelves ſick, that is our own folly, and no fault of the phyſician: but we are beholden to him, if he recover us, though it be by very bitter and unpleaſing means. All temporal judgments which are ſhort of death, are properly medicinal: and if we will but ſuffer them to have their kindly operation upon us, they will work a cure; and how grievous and diſtaſteful ſoever they may be for the preſent, they will prove mercies and bleſſings in the iſſue. Upon this account David reckons afflictions among the happy bleſſings of his life: Pſal. cxix. 71. *It is good*

good for me (says he) *that I have been afflicted;* and he gives the reason of it in the same Psalm, ℣ 67. *Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now I have learned thy precepts.*

So that though all afflictions are evils in themselves, yet they are good for us; because they discover to us our disease, and tend to our cure. They are a sensible argument and conviction to us of the evil and danger of sin. We are commonly such *fools* as Solomon speaks of, who *make a mock of sin;* and, like children, will be playing with the edge of it, till it cut and wound us. We are not sufficiently sensible how great an evil it is, till we come to feel the dismal effects and consequences of it. And therefore, to rectify our apprehensions concerning it, God makes us suffer by it. Thus Elihu describes to us the hapy effect of afflictions upon sinners, Job xxxvi. 8. 9. 10. *If they be bound in fetters, and held in cords of affliction; then God sheweth them their work, and their transgression that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from their iniquity.* God doth but invite and intreat us by his mercies; but his judgments have a more powerful and commanding voice. *When he holds men in cords of affliction, then he openeth their ear to discipline.* In prosperity, we are many times incapable of counsel and instruction; but when we are under God's correcting hand, then we are fit to be spoken withal.

2. The judgments of God are likewise proper for the preventing of far greater evils of the same kind; I mean further punishments. In sending of temporal judgments upon sinners, God usually proceeds with them by degrees. First he lets fly several single shots at them; and if upon these they will take warning and come in, they may prevent the broadsides and vollies of his wrath.

But the great advantage of all is, that temporal judgments may prove to us the opportunities of preventing the miserable and unspeakable torments of a long eternity. For all judgments which are not final, leaving men a space for repentance, have in them the mercy of a reprieve; which, by a serious and timely return to God, may be improved into a pardon.

Besides that adversity and afflictions do usually dispose

poſe men, and put them into a fit temper for repentance. They fix our minds, and make us ſerious; and are apt to awaken us to conſideration, and ſuggeſt to us ſuch thoughts and meditations as theſe. If temporal evils be ſo grievous, how inſupportable then will be the extreme and endleſs torments of the next life? If in this day of God's grace and patience we ſometimes meet with ſuch ſeverity, what may we not look for in the day of vengeance? If theſe drops of God's wrath which now and then fall upon ſinners in this world, fill them with ſo much anguiſh and affliction, how deplorably miſerable will thoſe wretches be upon whom the ſtorms of his fury ſhall fall? Who would venture to continue in ſin, when the greateſt miſeries and calamities which we feel in this life, are but a ſmall and inconſiderable earneſt of thoſe woful wages which ſinners ſhall receive in the day of recompence?

3. The judgments of God are not only proper to theſe ends, but in many caſes very neceſſary. Our condition many times is ſuch as to require this ſevere way of proceeding; becauſe no other courſe that God hath taken, or can take with us, will probably do us good. God does not delight in the miſeries and calamities of his creatures; but we put him upon theſe extremities; or rather his own goodneſs and wiſdom together do prompt and direct him to theſe harſh and rigorous ways. May be we have brought ourſelves into that dangerous ſtate, and the malignity of our diſtemper is ſuch, that it is not to be removed without violent phyſick, and that cannot be adminiſtered to us without making us deadly ſick.

So that the judgments of God which are many times *abroad in the earth*, are nothing elſe but the wiſe methods which the great phyſician of the world uſes for the cure of mankind. They are the rods of his ſchool, and the diſcipline of his providence, that *the inhabitants of the world may learn righteouſneſs*. They are a merciful invention of heaven, to do men that good which many times nothing elſe will, and to work that bleſſed effect upon us which neither the wiſe counſels and admonitions of God's word, nor his milder and gentler dealings with us, can uſually attain.

Thus we find in the parable, Luke xv. that the providence of God makes uſe of hunger and extreme neceſſity

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to bring home the prodigal; and by him our Saviour repreſents to us the temper of moſt ſinners. For till we have ſpent that ſtock of mercies which God hath given us; till we come to be pinched with want, and are *ready to periſh*, we are not apt to entertain thoughts of *returning to our Father*.

It may be there are ſome ſinners which are more tractable, and eaſy to be reduced to goodneſs, that are not ſo headſtrong and obſtinate in their way, but that they may be reclaimed by milder and ſofter means. But there are likewiſe a great many ſenſeleſs and outrageous ſinners, who are madly and furiouſly bent upon their own ruin. Now, to treat theſe fairly, with the allurements of kindneſs, and the gentle arts of perſuaſion, would be to no purpoſe: the only way that is left of dealing with them, is, rigour and ſeverity. When ſinners are thus beſides themſelves, ſomething that looks like cruelty is perhaps the greateſt mercy that can be ſhown to them; nothing ſo proper for ſuch perſons as a dark room, and a ſpare diet, and ſevere uſage: *A rod for the back of fools*, as the wiſe man ſpeaks.

Thus I have done with the firſt thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely, the merciful deſign and intention of God in ſending judgments upon a people; which is, to bring them to repentance, and by repentance to prevent their ruin. I proceed to the

II. The reaſon of the continuance of God's judgments; becauſe the people were not reclaimed by them: Therefore *his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill*; becauſe *the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of hoſts*.

And how can it be expected it ſhould be otherwiſe, when incorrigibleneſs under the judgments of God is a provocation of ſo high a nature, a ſign of a moſt depraved and incorrigible temper, and an argument of the greateſt obſtinacy in evil? Upon this account we find, that the Holy Spirit of God in ſcripture brands Ahaz as a ſingular and remarkable ſort of ſinner, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. becauſe *in the time of his diſtreſs he ſinned yet more againſt the Lord*. The longer Pharaoh and the Egyptians reſiſted the judgments of God, the more ſtill they were hardened, and the more they were plagued. Lev. xxvi. 22.

22.—28. after God had there threatened his people with ſeveral ſore judgments for their ſins, he tells them, that if they *will not be reformed by all theſe things*, he will *puniſh them ſeven times more*, and after that *ſeven times more, for their ſins*. And if in ſuch a caſe the juſt God will puniſh ſeven times more, we may ſafely conclude, that ſins after judgments are ſeven times greater.

So likewiſe, Deut. xxviii. after a long and dreadful catalogue of curſes there denounced againſt the people of Iſrael in caſe of their diſobedience, God at laſt threatens them with a foreign enemy that ſhould *diſtreſs them in their gates*; and if they would not be reclaimed by all this, he tells them, that he hath ſtill more and greater judgments for them in ſtore: ℣ 58. & 59. *If thou wilt not obſerve to do all the words of this law, that thou mayeſt fear this great and glorious name,* THE LORD THY GOD; *then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful.* If we be of ſo ſtrange and monſtrous a diſpoſition as to grow worſe under judgments, God will deal with us after an unuſual and prodigious manner; he will make our *plagues wonderful*.

This incorrigible temper the Prophets of old every where make the great aggravation of the ſin of Iſrael: Iſ. i. 4. 5. *Ah! ſinful nation, a people laden with iniquity*. And, after a great many other expreſſions to ſet forth what heinous ſinners they were, he ſums up all in this, that they were ſo far from being reformed by the ſeveral judgments of God which had been inflicted upon them, that they were the worſe for correction: *Why ſhould they be ſtricken any more? they will revolt more and more*. So likewiſe, Hoſ. vii. 9. 10. Ephraim, though brought very low, is repreſented as of the ſame refractory temper: *Strangers have devoured his ſtrength*, &c.; *but they do not return to the Lord, nor ſeek him for all this*. I will mention but one text more, and methinks it bears but too near a reſemblance with our own condition, both in reſpect of the judgments which have been upon us, and our carriage under them, Amos iv. where God upbraids his people ſeveral times with this, as the great aggravation of their ſins, that they continued impenitent under all thoſe terrible judgments of God which had been upon them: *I have ſent among you* (ſays he) *famine*, and then *peſtilence*,

and then the *ſword*, and laſt of all a terrible *fire*, which had almoſt utterly conſumed them: ℣ 11. *I have overthrown ſome of you, as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me.* And becauſe all theſe judgments had not been effectual to reclaim them, he tells them, that he was reſolved to go on in puniſhing; and therefore he bids them to expect it, and prepare themſelves for it: ℣ 12. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Iſrael: and becauſe I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Iſrael.* When God hath begun to puniſh a people, and they are not amended by it, the honour of his juſtice is concerned to proceed, and not to give over. By every ſin that we commit, we offend God; but if he ſmite us, and we ſtand out againſt him, then do we contend with him, and ſtrive for maſtery. And when the ſinner is upon theſe ſtubborn and inſolent terms, then *prepare to met thy God:* A bitter ſarcaſm; as if man could be a match for God, and a poor weak creature in any ways able to encounter him to whom power belongs. There is a ſevere expreſſion concerning God's dealing with ſuch perverſe and obſtinate ſinners, Pſal. xviii. 26. *With the froward thou wilt ſhew thyſelf froward*; or, as the words may more properly and conveniently be rendered, *With the froward thou wilt wreſtle.* God will not be outbraved by the ſins of men; and therefore, if we continue impenitent, we have all the reaſon in the world to expect that God will go on to puniſh.

But to come nearer to ourſelves, and to conſider our own caſe, which is in truth ſo very bad, that we may almoſt be afraid to conſider it. The wiſe and good God, like a prudent and indulgent father, hath uſed all the arts of his providence towards this nation to reclaim us. He hath invited us to him by many bleſſings, but we would not come. So (to borrow an apt illuſtration from * a great divine of our own) we have forced him to deal with us as Abſalom did with Joab: he ſent one civil meſſage to him after another, but he would not come; at laſt he ſets on fire his corn-field to try whether that would bring him. This courſe God hath taken with us. We would not be perſuaded by meſſages of kindneſs, by his many

* Biſhop Saunderſon.

many bleſſings and favours, to return to him; and therefore hath he ſent amongſt us the terrible meſſengers of his wrath. Firſt we were engaged in a foreign war; and though God was pleaſed to give us ſome conſiderable ſucceſs in it, yet it ſeems our provocations were ſo great, that he was reſolved to puniſh us. He was loth to let us *fall into the hands of men*, and therefore he took the work into his own hand, and puniſhed us himſelf, by ſending a peſtilence amongſt us, the ſoreſt and moſt deſtructive that hath befallen this nation for many ages. But we did not upon this return to him; and therefore his fierce anger kindled a fearful fire amongſt us, which hath laid the honour of our nation, one of the greateſt and richeſt cities in the world, in the duſt; and that by ſo ſudden and irreſiſtible, ſo diſmal and amazing a devaſtation, as in all the circumſtances of it is ſcarce to be paralleled in any hiſtory.

I doubt not but moſt of us were mightily affected with this judgment whilſt it was upon us. So aſtoniſhing a calamity could not but make us open our eyes a little, and awaken us to conſideration. Even the rich man in the goſpel, though he had all his lifetime been immerſed in ſenſuality, yet could not but *lift up his eyes when he was in flames.*

And ſurely God expects that ſuch judgments as theſe ſhould not only rouſe us a little for the preſent, but that they ſhould have a permanent operation and effect upon us, and work a thorough and laſting reformation amongſt us; but yet I am afraid that this dreadful fire hath had no other influence upon us, but what it uſes to have upon metals, which are only melted by it for the preſent, but when the fire is removed, they ſuddenly cool, and return to their former hardneſs.

One would have thought, that the ſenſe of ſuch a calamity as this ſhould have remained longer upon us. Methinks God ſeemed to ſay to us after this judgment, as he did once to Jeruſalem, Zeph. iii. 7. *Surely thou wilt fear me; thou wilt receive inſtruction.* But we, like them, have been but the more forward to provoke him: *They roſe early, and corrupted their doings:* we have, after all this, *hardened our hearts from his fear, and refuſed to return.* And therefore God is now come to one of his

laſt judgments; *Our enemy diſtreſſeth us in our gates.* God hath begun to *let us fall into the hands of men;* and, by giving our enemies a ſudden and fatal advantage upon us, hath ſmitten us with a *breach great as the ſea.*

Theſe were terrible calamities indeed, to come ſo thick and ſo ſwiftly upon us, *like deſolation, and as a whirl-wind.* Such a quick ſucceſſion of judgments, treading almoſt upon one another's heels, does but too plainly declare that God is highly incenſed againſt us. For ſurely theſe are not the wounds of a friend, but the terrible aſſaults of an enemy: they do not look like the diſpleaſure of a father, but the ſeverity of a judge; not like viſitation, but like vengeance.

And, beſides theſe more viſible judgments upon the nation, we are by a ſecret curſe of God inſenſibly decayed in our riches and ſtrength; we are, I know not how, ſtrangely impoveriſhed in the midſt of plenty, and almoſt undone by victories: and, which adds to our miſery, few among us ſeem to be ſufficiently ſenſible of it, or to take any notice by what ſilent ſteps and imperceptible degrees, like gray hairs, and the infirmities of old age, poverty and weakneſs are ſtealing in upon us. So that we may fitly apply to ourſelves what the Prophet ſays of Ephraim, Hoſ. vii. 9. *Strangers have devoured his ſtrength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, and yet he knoweth it not.*

And our condition, as we are a church, is not much better. How is this famous Proteſtant church of ours, which was once the admiration of her friends, and the envy of her enemies, ſunk and declined in her glory, and reduced into a very narrow compaſs? ſo that ſhe is *leſt* like *the daughter of Zion,* Iſ. i. 8. *as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a beſieged city;* ſtraitened and hemmed in on all parts, by the impudence of Atheiſm, the inſolencies of Popery, and the turbulency of faction; all which do every day viſibly and apace gain ground upon her, and diſtreſs her on every ſide: juſt as the condition of the Jewiſh church is deſcribed before my text, *The Syrians before, and the Philiſtines behind, both ready to devour Iſrael with open mouth.*

And ſurely it is not for nothing that God hath brought us thus low, that he hath ſent all theſe judgments upon

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us, and that he doth ſtill threaten us with more. The reaſon is plain; becauſe we are ſtill impenitent: *The people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them.* There hath been almoſt an univerſal degeneracy amongſt us, and there is ſtill, I fear, a general impenitency: *The people turneth not*, &c. Notwithſtanding all thoſe diſmal calamities which our eyes have ſeen, wickedneſs doth ſtill prevail in the nation, and overflows it like a mighty deluge, ſo as to overſpread all ranks and orders of men: and not only ſo, but is grown impudent, and appears *with a whore's forehead;* all kind of modeſty ſeems to have forſaken the ſinners of this age.

And is this repentance? to live in filthy and abominable luſts; to tear the name of God by horrid oaths and imprecations; to be Atheiſtical and profane; and, by an unexampled boldneſs, to turn the word of God itſelf, and the graveſt and moſt ſerious matters of religion, into raillery? This is not *to turn to him that ſmiteth us;* but to turn upon him, and ſmite him again. And yet ſuch crying and clamorous ſins as theſe, are almoſt come to be the garb and faſhion of the nation, and to be accounted the wit and gallantry of the age.

And *ſhall not God viſit for theſe things? ſhall not his ſoul be avenged on ſuch a nation as this?* Yes; he hath viſited; and it is for theſe things that *the wrath of God* hath been ſo manifeſtly *revealed from heaven* againſt us. For this cauſe *miſery and deſtruction* have been *in our way, and the way of peace have we not known*, becauſe there hath been *no fear of God before our eyes.* Hence it is, that *God's anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill; becauſe the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of hoſts.*

But do not we *ſeek God?* Do we not every day acknowledge our ſins to him, and pray that he would *have mercy upon us miſerable offenders*, and *grant that we may hereafter live godly, righteous and ſober lives?* Do not we *ſeek the Lord of hoſts*, when we continually beg of him to ſave *and deliver us from the hand of our enemies?* Indeed we do thus *ſeek* him: but we ſhould firſt *turn to him;* otherwiſe if we hope our prayers will prevail with God to do us good, we do but *truſt in lying words.* If we go on in our ſins, our very prayers will *become ſin*, and

increaſe our guilt: for the *prayer of the wicked*, that is, of one that is reſolved to continue ſo, *is an abomination to the Lord.* Can we think it reaſonable for men to addreſs themſelves to God after this manner: "Lord, "though we have no mind to turn to thee, yet we pray "thee turn away thine anger from us; though we are "reſolved not to forſake our ſins, yet we make no "doubt but that thy mercy will forgive them. Give "peace in our time, O Lord, that we may purſue our "luſts ſecurely and without diſturbance; deliver us, "we pray thee, from the hands of our enemies, that "we may ſin againſt thee without fear all the days of "our lives?" Would it not be horrible impudence and impiety to put up any ſuch petitions to God? And yet this, I fear, is the moſt genuine interpretation of our prayers and lives compared together.

And if this be our caſe, what can we expect? God may give us peace with our enemies, but then he will find out ſome other way to puniſh us: for if we ſtill perſiſt in our Atheiſm and profaneneſs, in our contempt of God and of his holy worſhip, in our ſcorn and deriſion of religion, in our abominable luſts and horrid impieties, what can we look for, but that God ſhould be *angry with us until he have conſumed us, and there be no eſcaping?* Nothing can be a ſadder preſage of our ruin, than not to be reformed by thoſe dreadful judgments of God which have been upon us. This was that which brought final deſtruction upon the Egyptians in the Red ſea, that they had held out ſo obſtinately againſt ſo many judgments, and had been *hardened under ten plagues.* To be impenitent, after ſuch ſevere corrections, is to poiſon ourſelves with that which is intended for our phyſick, and, by a miraculous kind of obſtinacy, to turn the rods of God into ſerpents.

And now perhaps ſome will be apt to ſay, That theſe are things fit for men of our profeſſion; becauſe it is our trade, and we live by it. Indeed they are ſo; things very fit to be ſaid, and withal very fit for every one to conſider, who profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian, and who owns the belief of a God, and a providence, and another world. And if they be ſo, where is the fault? Is it, that there is a peculiar profeſſion of men whoſe proper work

work it is to tell men of their faults, and to perſuade them to reform? No; there is no harm in that neither. Is it then, that they live by their profeſſion, and yet would be believed? Yes; there lies the force of the objection. To which I ſhall only at preſent return this anſwer, That men do not argue thus in other caſes, when yet the reaſon ſeems to be the very ſame. In matters that concern their bodies and eſtates, the phyſician and the lawyer are believed, though it is verily thought that they live by their profeſſions as well as we; why then ſhould men deal ſo partially and unequally only with their ſouls? Were we not moved by better principles, and ſwayed by the arguments and conſiderations of another world, we might, for ought we know, with every whit as much advantage to ourſelves, ſuffer men to be quiet and to ſleep on ſecurely in their ſins; if we did not believe ourſelves in theſe matters, what ſhould hinder but that we might with as much gravity and confidence cry, Peace, peace, when there is no peace; and flatter men with as much art, and with as good a grace, as any of thoſe can do who live delicately, and wear ſoft clothing?

But *we believe* the threatenings of God, and *therefore do we ſpeak. We know the terrors of the Lord,* and therefore we endeavour *to perſuade men.* And oh! that we could perſuade them *to break off their ſins by righteouſneſs,* and to *turn every one from the evil of his way, and from the violence that is in his hands:* and then *who can tell but God may turn, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we periſh not?*

The good God make us all wiſe *to know in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes;* and grant that we may all *turn to him that hath ſmitten us,* by repentance, and real reformation of our lives; that God may be pleaſed to *turn away his anger* from us, and to *ſtretch out his hand* for our deliverance. Which we humbly beg of him for the ſake of Chriſt. To whom, with the Father, *&c.*

SERMON

SERMON X.

Of the deceitfulneſs and danger of ſin.

HEB. iii. 13.

Exhort one another daily while it is called, To-day; leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.

AMong the many conſiderations which the word of God and our own reaſon offer to us, to diſcourage us from ſin, this is none of the leaſt conſiderable, that he that once engages in a vitious courſe, is in danger to proceed in it, being inſenſibly trained on from one degree of wickedneſs to another; ſo that the farther he advances, his retreat grows the more difficult; becauſe he is ſtill puſhed on with a greater violence. All error as well of practice as of judgment, is endleſs; and when a man is once out of the way, the farther he ſhall go on, the harder he will find it to return into the right way. Therefore there is great reaſon why men ſhould be ſo often cautioned againſt the beginnings of ſin; or if they have been ſo unhappy as to be engaged in a bad courſe, why they ſhould be warned to break it off preſently, and without delay; leſt by degrees they be hardened in their wickedneſs, till their caſe grow deſperate, and paſt remedy. And to this purpoſe is the Apoſtle's advice here in the text: *Exhort one another daily while it is called, To-day; leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

From which words I ſhall,

1. Endeavour to repreſent to you the growing danger of ſin, and by what ſteps and degrees bad habits do inſenſibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil courſe.

2. I ſhall, from this conſideration, take occaſion to ſhew what great reaſon and need there is to warn men of this danger, and to endeavour to reſcue them out of it. And then,

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3. I ſhall apply myſelf to the duty here in the text, of exhorting men with all earneſtneſs and importunity to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin; or, if they be already entered upon a wicked courſe, to make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate; *leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to repreſent to you the growing danger of ſin, and by what ſteps and degrees bad habits do inſenſibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil courſe. All the actions of men which are not natural, but proceed from deliberation and choice, have ſomething of difficulty in them when we begin to practiſe them, becauſe at firſt we are rude and unexerciſed in that way; but after we have practiſed them a while, they become more eaſy; and when they are eaſy, we begin to take pleaſure in them; and when they pleaſe us, we do them frequently, and think we cannot repeat them too often; and by frequency of acts a thing grows into a habit; and a confirmed habit is a ſecond kind of nature; and ſo far as any thing is natural, ſo far it is neceſſary, and we can hardly do otherwiſe; nay, we do it many times when we do not think of it. For, by virtue of a habit, a man's mind or body becomes pliable and inclined to ſuch kind of actions as it is accuſtomed to, and does as it were ſtand bent and charged ſuch a way; ſo that, being touched and awakened by the leaſt occaſion, it breaks forth into ſuch or ſuch actions. And this is the natural progreſs of all habits indifferently conſidered, whether they be good or bad.

But vitious habits have a greater advantage, and are of a quicker growth. For the corrupt nature of man is a rank ſoil, to which vice takes eaſily, and wherein it thrives apace. The mind of man hath need to be prepared for piety and virtue; it muſt be cultivated to that end, and ordered with great care and pains. But vices are weeds that grow wild, and ſpring up of themſelves. They are in ſome ſort natural to the ſoil, and therefore they need not to be planted and watered; it is ſufficient, if they be neglected and let alone. So that vice having this advantage from our nature, it is no wonder, if occaſion and temptation eaſily draw it forth.

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But that we may take a more diſtinct account of the progreſs of ſin, and by what ſteps vice gains upon men, I ſhall mark out to you ſome of the chief and more obſervable gradations of it.

1. Men begin with leſſer ſins. No man is perfectly wicked on the ſudden. *Sunt quædam vitiorum elementa*, Juven. "There are certain rudiments of vice," in which men are firſt entered; and then they proceed by degrees to greater and fouler crimes: for ſin hath its infancy and tender age, and its ſeveral ſtates of growth. Men are not ſo totally degenerate, but at firſt they are aſhamed when they venture upon a known ſin, though it be but ſmall in compariſon. Hence it is, that at firſt men are very ſolicitous to palliate and hide their faults by excuſes; but, after they have frequently committed them, and they grow too viſible to be concealed, then they will attempt to defend and maintain them; and from thence they come by degrees to take pleaſure in them, and in thoſe that do the ſame things.

2. After men have been ſome time initiated in theſe leſſer ſins, by the commiſſion of theſe they are prepared and diſpoſed for greater; ſuch as lay waſte the conſcience, and offer more violence to the light and reaſon of their minds. By degrees a ſinner may grow to be ſo hardy as to attempt thoſe crimes, which at firſt he could not have had the thought of committing without horror: like Hazael, who when he was told by the prophet Eliſha, what barbarous cruelties he ſhould one day be guilty of towards the people of Iſrael when he ſhould come to be King of Syria, he abominated the very thought and mention of them: *Is thy ſervant a dog, that he ſhould do this great thing?* and yet, for all this, we know he did it afterwards. It is true indeed, when a ſinner is firſt tempted to the commiſſion of a more groſs and notorious ſin, his conſcience is apt to boggle and ſtart at it; he doth it with great difficulty and regret; the terrors of his own mind, and the fears of damnation, are very troubleſome to him: but this trouble wears off by degrees; and that which was at firſt difficult, does by frequent practice and long cuſtom become tolerable.

3. When a man hath proceeded thus far, he begins to put off ſhame, one of the greateſt reſtraints from ſin which

which God hath laid upon human nature. And when this curb once falls off, there is then but little left to reſtrain and hold us in. At firſt ſetting out upon a vitious courſe, men are a little nice and delicate; like young travellers, who at firſt are offended at every ſpeck of dirt that lights upon them; but after they have been accuſtomed to it, and have travelled a good while in foul ways, it ceaſeth to be troubleſome to them to be daſhed and beſpattered.

4. After this it is poſſible men may come to approve their vices: for if mens judgments do not command their wills, and reſtrain their luſts, it is great odds, in proceſs of time the vitious inclinations of their wills will put a falſe bias upon their judgments; and then it is no wonder if men come to boaſt of their ſins, and to glory in their vices, when they are half perſuaded that they are generous and commendable qualities. Thus much is certain in experience, that ſome men have gotten ſo perfect a habit of ſome ſins, as not to know and take notice many times when they commit them: as in the caſe of ſwearing; which ſome men have ſo accuſtomed themſelves to, that, without any conſideration, they do of courſe put an oath or two into every ſentence that comes from them. And it hath been obſerved of ſome perſons, that they have told an untruth ſo often, and averred it with ſo much confidence, till at laſt, forgetting that it was a lie at firſt, they themſelves have in proceſs of time believed it to be true.

5. From this pitch of wickedneſs, men commonly proceed to draw in others, and to make proſelytes to their vices. Now, this ſignifies not only a great approbation of ſin, but even a fondneſs for it, when men are not content to ſin upon their own ſingle accounts, but they muſt turn zealous agents and factors for the devil; become teachers of ſin and *miniſters of unrighteouſneſs*, and are factiouſly concerned to propagate, together with their Atheiſtical principles, their lewd practices, and to draw followers and diſciples after them.

And when they are arrrived to this height, it is natural for them to hate reproof, and to reſiſt the means of their recovery; to quarrel againſt all the remedies that,

that ſhall be offered to them, and to count thoſe their greateſt enemies, who have ſo much courage and kindneſs as to deal plainly with them, and to tell them the truth. And then all the wiſe counſels of God's word, and the moſt gentle and prudent admonitions in the world, when they are tendered to ſuch perſons, ſerve only to provoke their ſcorn or their paſſion. And ſurely that man is in a ſad caſe that is ſo diſpoſed, that, in all probability, he will turn the moſt effectual means of his amendment into the occaſion of new and greater ſins.

But that which renders the condition of ſuch perſons much more ſad and deplorable, is, that all this while God is withdrawing his grace from them; for every degree of ſin cauſeth the Holy Spirit of God, with all his bleſſed motions and aſſiſtances, to retire farther from them: and not only ſo, but the devil, that evil ſpirit, which the ſcripture tells us *works effectually in the children of diſobedience*, does, according as men improve in wickedneſs, get a greater and a more eſtabliſhed dominion over them. For as they who are reclaimed from an evil courſe, are ſaid, in ſcripture, to be *reſcued out of the ſnare of the devil*, and to be *turned from the power of Satan unto God*; ſo, on the other hand, the farther men advance in the ways of ſin, ſo much the farther they depart from God, from under the influence of his grace, and the care of his protection and providence; and they give the devil, who is not apt to neglect his advantages upon them, greater opportunities every day to gain the firmer poſſeſſion of them.

And thus, by paſſing from one degree of ſin to another, the ſinner becomes hardened in his wickedneſs, and does inſenſibly ſlide into that, in which, without a miraculous grace of God, he is like for ever to continue. For the mind of man, after it hath been long accuſtomed to evil, and is once grown old in vice, is almoſt as hard to be rectified, as it is to recover a body bowed down with age to its firſt ſtraightneſs. The ſcripture ſpeaks of ſome that *commit ſin with greedineſs*, and that *drink up iniquity as the ox drinketh up water*; with a mighty appetite and thirſt, as if they were not able to refrain from it: and, to expreſs to us the miſerable condition of ſuch perſons, it repreſenteth them as perfect ſlaves to their

their vices, that have ſold themſelves to do wickedneſs, and *are led captive by Satan at his pleaſure.* And when men have brought themſelves to this paſs, they are almoſt under a fatal neceſſity of ſinning on. I do not believe that God hath abſolutely predeſtinated any man to ruin; but, by a long courſe of wilful ſin, men may in a ſort predeſtinate themſelves to it; and chuſe wickedneſs ſo long, till it almoſt becomes neceſſary, and till they have brought themſelves under all imaginable diſadvantages of contributing any thing towards their own recovery; being bound in the chains of their own wickedneſs, and held in the cords of their ſins: nay, like Samſon, not only bound by thoſe luſts which they have embraced, but likewiſe robbed of all their ſtrength whereby they ſhould break looſe from thoſe bonds. God grant that none of us may ever have the woful experience of it. But I am horribly afraid it is too true, that a ſinner may arrive to that confirmed ſtate of impiety, as almoſt totally to loſe his liberty to do better. He may attain to that perfection in vice, as to continue to be a bad man upon the ſame account that the hiſtorian extravagantly ſays Cato was virtuous, *quia aliter eſſe non potuit*, Vell. Paterc. "becauſe he could not be otherwiſe." *Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the leopard his ſpots?* It is the ſcripture-compariſon, to ſet forth to us how hard a thing it is for a man to be brought to goodneſs that hath been long accuſtomed to do evil. He that is thus deeply engaged and intangled in a bad courſe, will ſcarce ever have the heart and reſolution to break looſe from it, unleſs he be forced violently out of it by ſome ſevere affliction, by a ſharp ſickneſs, or by a terrible calamity; or by the preſent apprehenſions of death, and the terrors of a future judgment. Nor will theſe be effectual neither, to change ſuch a perſon, without an extraordinary degree of God's grace; which, conſidering the greatneſs and the continuance of his provocations, he hath very little reaſon to expect or hope God ſhould ever beſtow upon him. Wretched man! that haſt brought thyſelf into this miſerable ſtate, out of which there is but juſt a poſſibility left of thy being reſcued; that haſt neglected thy diſeaſe ſo long, till it is almoſt too late to apply remedies; that haſt provoked God ſo far, and ſinned to

ſuch a prodigious height, that thou haſt reaſon almoſt to deſpair both of his grace and aſſiſtance for thy repentance, and of his mercy for thy pardon. I ſpeak not this to diſcourage even the greateſt of ſinners from repentance. Tho' their caſe be extremely difficult, yet it is not quite deſperate; *for thoſe things which ſeem impoſſible with men, are poſſible with God.* But I ſpeak it on purpoſe to ſtop ſinners in their courſe, and to diſcourage men from going on in ſin till they be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of it, and have brought themſelves by inſenſible degrees into that dangerous and difficult ſtate which I have all this while been repreſenting to you. I come now to the *Second* thing I propounded; which was, from this conſideration, to ſhew what great reaſon and need there is to warn men of this danger, and to endeavour to reſcue them out of it. The Apoſtle directs this precept to all Chriſtians: *Exhort one another daily, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin;* that is, leſt you be hardened by degrees, and finally ruined. And ſurely every man is concerned to do what in him lies to reſcue his brother from ſo imminent a danger. It is every one's place and duty, to endeavour to ſave thoſe whom he ſees ready to periſh: much more does it concern thoſe who are peculiarly ſet apart for this work; I mean the Miniſters of God's holy word, whoſe proper office and buſineſs it is, to *exhort* and *warn every man day and night,* who are *ſet as watchmen to the houſe of Iſrael,* and *whoſe blood,* in caſe any of them miſcarry through our neglect, *ſhall be required at our hands.* So that, if we believe the threatenings of God, which we declare to others; if we have any apprehenſion of the dreadful miſery of another world; if we have any ſenſe of our own duty and ſafety; if we have any pity for periſhing ſouls: we cannot but be very importunate with ſinners, to look about them, and to conſider their danger, and to bethink themſelves ſeriouſly of the miſerable event and iſſue of a wicked life; we cannot but be earneſt with them, *to break off their ſins, and to give glory to God by repentance, before darkneſs come, and their feet ſtumble upon the dark mountains.* When we are convinced more fully than we can deſire, that *miſery and deſtruction are in their ways;* when we plainly ſee the *evil day* haſting towards them apace, and *deſtruction*

ction coming upon them like a whirlwind; heaven above threatening them, and *hell beneath moving herſelf to meet them at their coming*: can we poſſibly do leſs, than to warn ſuch perſons *to flee from the wrath which is to come*; and, out of a ſad apprehenſion of the danger that hangs over them, to caution them againſt it, and endeavour with all our might to reſcue them from the miſery which is ready to ſwallow them up? Indeed one would be apt to think it a very vain thing to diſſuade men from being miſerable; to uſe great vehemency of argument, to hinder a man from leaping into a pit, or from running into the fire; to take great pains to argue a ſick man into a deſire of health, and to make a priſoner contented to have his ſhackles knocked off, and to be ſet at liberty; one would think all this were perfectly needleſs: but yet we ſee in experience, ſin is a thing of ſo ſtupifying a nature, as to make men inſenſible of their danger, although it be ſo near, and ſo terrible. It is not ſo with men in other caſes. When we labour of any bodily diſtemper, it is much to find a man that is patient of his diſeaſe: but when our ſouls are mortally ſick; that we ſhould be contented with our condition, and fond of our diſeaſe; that we ſhould fight with our phyſician, and ſpurn at our remedy; this ſurely is the height of diſtraction, for men to be thus abſolutely bent upon their own ruin, and to reſolve to make away themſelves for ever. And we who are the meſſengers of God to men, muſt be born of the rocks, and have hearts *harder than the nether milſtone*, if we can patiently look on, and endure to ſee men periſh, without uſing our utmoſt endeavour to ſave them. Therefore I ſhall, in the *Third* and laſt place, apply myſelf to this work of exhortation, the duty commanded here in the text. And here I ſhall addreſs myſelf to two ſorts of perſons.

1. To perſuade thoſe who are yet innocent of great crimes, to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin, leſt it gain upon them by degrees.

2. To preſs and urge thoſe that are already entered upon a wicked courſe, that they would make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate, *leſt* at laſt *they be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

1. To perſuade thoſe who are yet in ſome meaſure innocent, to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin, leſt it gain upon

them by degrees. Vice may eaſily be diſcouraged at firſt. It is like a ſlight diſeaſe, which is eaſy to be cured, but dangerous to be neglected. The firſt approaches of ſin and temptation are uſually very modeſt; but, if they be not diſcountenanced, they will ſoon grow upon us, and make bolder attempts. Every inclination to ſin, every compliance with temptation, is a going down the hill: while we keep our ſtanding, we may command ourſelves; but if we once put ourſelves into violent motion downward, we cannot ſtop when we pleaſe.

Omne in præcipiti vitium ſtetit———

"All vice ſtands upon a precipice;" and to engage in any ſinful courſe, is to run down the hill. And if we once let looſe the propenſions of our nature, we cannot gather in the reins, and govern them as we pleaſe. If we give way to preſumptuous ſins, they will quickly get dominion over us. It is much eaſier not to begin a bad courſe, than to put a ſtop to ourſelves after we have begun it. *Stulta res eſt nequitiæ modus*, Seneca: "It is a "fond thing for a man to think to ſet bounds to himſelf "in any thing that is bad;" to reſolve to ſin in number, weight and meaſure, with great temperance and diſcretion, and government of himſelf; that he will commit this ſin, and then give over; entertain but this one temptation, and, after that, he will ſhut the door, and admit of no more. Our corrupt hearts, when they are once in motion, they are like the raging ſea, to which we can ſet no bounds, nor ſay to it, *Hitherto ſhalt thou go, and no further*. Sin is very cunning and deceitful, and does ſtrangely gain upon men when they once give way to it. It is of a very bewitching nature, and hath ſtrange arts of addreſs and inſinuation. The giving way to a ſmall ſin, does marvelloufly prepare and diſpoſe a man for a greater. By giving way to one little vice after another, the ſtrongeſt reſolution may be broken: for though it be not to be ſnapt in ſunder at once, yet by this means it is untwiſted by degrees, and then it is eaſy to break it, one thread after another. It is ſcarce imaginable of what force one ſinful action is to produce more: for ſin is very teeming and fruitful; and though there be no bleſſing annexed to it, yet it does ſtrangely increaſe

increaſe and multiply. As there is a connexion of one virtue with another, ſo vices are linked together, and one ſin draws many after it. When the devil tempts a man to commit any wickedneſs, he does, as it were, lay a long train of ſins; and, if the firſt temptation take, they give fire to one another. Let us then reſiſt the beginnings of ſin; becauſe then we have moſt power, and ſin hath leaſt. This is the firſt.

2. To perſuade thoſe who are already engaged in a wicked courſe, to make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate. And there is no other way to get out of it, but by repentance; that is, by a real change and reformation of our lives; for herein the nature of true repentance does conſiſt. And without this all the devices which men uſe to get rid of the guilt of their ſins, are vain, and to no purpoſe. It is not to be done by a formal confeſſion and abſolution; nor by a long pilgrimage; nor by one of thoſe little tickets from Rome which they call *indulgences*. A wiſe man would much ſooner perſuade himſelf that God will not at all puniſh the ſins of men, than that he would forgive them ſo eaſily, and receive great offenders to favour upon ſuch ſlight terms. Let us not deceive ourſelves: there is one plain way to heaven, by ſincere repentance, and a holy life; and there is no getting thither by tricks. And without this change of our lives, all our ſorrow, and faſting, and humiliation for ſin, which at this ſeaſon we make profeſſion of, will ſignify nothing. There is an excellent paſſage of the ſon of Sirach to this purpoſe, Eccluſ xxxiv. 25. 26. *He that waſheth himſelf after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his waſhing? So is it with a man that faſteth for his ſins, and goeth again and doth the ſame things: who will hear his prayer? or what doth his humbling profit him?* There is this plain difference between trouble for ſin, and repentance; ſorrow only reſpects ſins paſt, but repentance is chiefly preventive of ſins for the future: and God therefore requires that we ſhould be troubled for our ſins, that we may reſolve to leave them.

And, to oblige us to a vigorous and ſpeedy reſolution in this matter, let us conſider that we have engaged too far already in a bad courſe; and that every day

our retreat will grow more dangerous and difficult; that by our delays we make work for a ſadder and longer repentance, than that which we do now ſo ſtudiouſly decline. Let us conſider likewiſe, that our life is concerned in the caſe; that *except we repent and turn, we ſhall die;* and that the evil day may overtake us while we are deliberating whether we ſhould avoid it or not; that vice is ſo far from being mortified by age, that, by every day's continuance in it, we increaſe the power of it; and ſo much ſtrength as we add to our diſeaſe, we certainly take from ourſelves: and this is a double weakening of us, when we do not only loſe our own ſtrength, but the enemy gets it, and employs it againſt us. The deceitfulneſs of ſin appears in nothing more than in keeping men off from this neceſſary work, and perſuading them to hazard all, upon the unreaſonable hopes of the mercy of God, and the uncertain reſolution of a future repentance. I do not think there are any here but do either believe, or at leaſt are vehemently afraid, that there is another life after this; and that a wicked life, without repentance, muſt unavoidably make them miſerable in another world; and that to caſt off all to a death-bed repentance, puts things upon a mighty hazard. And they have a great deal of reaſon to think ſo: for, alas! how unfit are moſt men at ſuch a time for ſo great and ſerious a work as repentance is, when they are unfit for the ſmalleſt matters? and how hard is it for any man then to be aſſured of the truth and reality of his repentance, when there is no ſufficient opportunity to make trial of the ſincerity of it? I deny not the poſſibility of the thing: but it is much to be feared, that the repentance of a dying ſinner is uſually but like the ſorrow of a malefactor, when he is ready to be turned off: he is not troubled that he hath offended the law; but he is troubled that he muſt die. For when death is ready to ſeize upon the ſinner, and he feels himſelf dropping into deſtruction, no wonder if then the man's ſtomach come down, and he be contented to be ſaved; and, ſeeing he muſt ſtay no longer in this world, be deſirous to go to heaven rather than hell; and, in order to that, be ready to give ſome teſtimonies of his repentance: no wonder if, when the rack is before him, this

this extort confession from him; and if, in hopes of a pardon, he make many large promises of amendment, and freely declare his resolution of a new and better life. But then it is the hardest thing in the world, to judge whether any thing of all this that is done under so great a fear and force, be real. For a sick man, as he hath lost an appetite to the most pleasant meats and drinks, so likewise his sinful pleasures, and fleshly lusts, are at the same time nauseous to him: and for the very same reason; for sickness having altered the temper of his body, he hath not at that time any gust or relish for these things. And now he is resolved against sin, just as a man that hath no stomach is resolved against meat. But if the fit were over, and death would but raise his siege, and remove his quarters a little farther from him; it is to be feared that his former appetite would soon return to him, and that he would sin with the same eagerness he did before. Besides, how can we expect that God should accept of our repentance at such a time, when we are conscious to ourselves that we did resolve to put off our repentance till we could sin no longer? Can we think it fit for any man to say thus to God in a dying hour: "Lord, now the world leaves me, I come to thee. I "pray thee give me eternal life, who could never afford to give thee one good day of my life. Grant "that I may live with thee, and enjoy thee for ever, "who could never endure to think upon thee. I must "confess that I could never be persuaded to leave my "sins out of love to thee; but now I repent of them for "fear of thee. I am conscious to myself that I would "never do any thing for thy sake; but yet I hope thy goodness is such, that thou wilt forgive all the ungodliness "and unrighteousness of my life, and accept of this forced submission which I now make to thee. I pray thee do "not at last frustrate and disappoint me in this design "which I have laid, of sinning while I live, and getting "to heaven when I die?" Surely no man can think it fit to say thus to God; and yet I am afraid this is the true interpretation of many a man's repentance, who hath deferred it till he comes to die. I do not speak this to discourage repentance, even at that time. It is always the best thing we can do. But I would by all means

means diſcourage men from putting off ſo neceſſary a work till then. It is true indeed, when it is come to this, and a ſinner finds himſelf going out of the world, if he have been ſo fooliſh, and ſo cruel to himſelf, as to put things upon this laſt hazard, repentance is now the only thing that is left for him to do. This is his laſt remedy, and the only refuge he has to fly to; and this is that which the Miniſter in this caſe ought by all means to put the man upon, and earneſtly to perſuade him to. But when we ſpeak to men in other circumſtances, that are well, and in health, we dare not for all the world encourage them to venture their ſouls upon ſuch an uncertainty. For, to ſpeak the beſt of it, it is a very dangerous remedy; eſpecially when men have deſignedly contrived to rob God of the ſervice of their beſt days, and to put him off with a few unprofitable ſighs and tears at the hour of death. I deſire to have as large apprehenſions of the mercy of God as any man; but, withal, I am very ſure that he is the hardeſt to be impoſed upon of any one in the world. And no man that hath any worthy apprehenſions of the Deity, can imagine him to be ſo eaſy, as to forgive men upon the leaſt word and intimation of their minds, and to have ſuch a fondneſs for offenders as would reflect upon the prudence of any magiſtrate and governor upon earth. God grant that I may ſincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous life, and may have the comfort of that when I come to die; and that I may never be ſo unwiſe as to venture all my hopes of a bleſſed eternity upon a death-bed repentance.

I will conclude all with thoſe excellent ſayings of the ſon of Sirach, Ecclus v. 6. 7. xvi. 11. 12. & xviii. 21. 22. *Say not, God's mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my ſins. For mercy and wrath are with him; he is mighty to forgive, and to pour out diſpleaſure: and as his mercy is great, ſo are his corrections alſo. Therefore make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for ſuddenly ſhall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy ſecurity thou ſhalt be deſtroyed. Humble thyſelf before thou be ſick, and in the time of ſins ſhew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be juſtified.*

SER-

SERMON XI.

The hazard of being ſaved in the church of Rome.

1 COR. iii. 15.

But he himſelf ſhall be ſaved; yet ſo, as by fire.

THE context is thus: *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wiſe maſter-builder I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Jeſus Chriſt. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, ſilver, precious ſtones, wood, hay, ſtubble; every man's work ſhall be made manifeſt. For the day ſhall declare it, becauſe it ſhall be revealed by fire; and the fire ſhall try every man's work, of what ſort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he ſhall receive a reward. If any man's work ſhall be burnt, he ſhall ſuffer loſs: but he himſelf ſhall be ſaved; yet ſo, as by fire.*

In theſe words the Apoſtle ſpeaks of a ſort of perſons, who held indeed the foundation of Chriſtianity, but built upon it ſuch doctrines or practices as would not bear the trial; which he expreſſes to us by *wood*, *hay*, and *ſtubble*, which are not proof againſt the fire. Such a perſon, the Apoſtle tells us, hath brought himſelf into a very dangerous ſtate, though he would not deny the poſſibility of his ſalvation: *He himſelf ſhall be ſaved; yet ſo, as by fire.*

That by *fire* here is not meant the fire of purgatory, as ſome pretend, who would be glad of any ſhadow of a text of ſcripture to countenance their own dreams, I ſhall neither trouble you nor myſelf to manifeſt; ſince the particle of ſimilitude ὡς plainly ſhews, that the Apoſtle did not intend an eſcape out of the fire literally, but like to that which men make out of a houſe or town that

that is on fire: especially since very learned persons of the church of Rome do acknowledge, that purgatory cannot be concluded from this text: nay, all that Estius contends for from this place, is, that it cannot be concluded from hence that there is no purgatory; which we never pretended, but only that this text doth not prove it.

It is very well known, that this is a proverbial phrase, used not only in scripture, but in profane authors, to signify a narrow escape out of a great danger: *He shall be saved; yet so, as by fire;* διὰ πυρὸς, *out of the fire.* Just as δι' ὕδατος is used, 1 Pet. iii. 20. where the Apostle, speaking of the eight persons of Noah's family who escaped the flood, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος, they escaped *out of the water.* So here this phrase is to be rendered in the text, *He himself shall escape; yet so, as out of the fire.* The like expression you have, Amos iv. 11. *I have plucked them as a firebrand out of the fire.* And Jude, ℣ 23. *Others save with fear, plucking them out of the fire.* All which expressions signify the greatness of the danger, and the difficulty of escaping it; "as one who, when "his house at midnight is set on fire, and being sud-"denly waked, leaps out of his bed, and runs naked "out of the doors, taking nothing that is within along "with him, but employing his whole care to save his "body from the flames;" as St. Chrysostom upon another occasion expresseth it. And so the Roman orator, who it is likely did not think of purgatory, useth this phrase: *Quo ex judicio, velut ex incendio, nudus effugit,* Tully: "From which judgment or sentence he escaped "naked, as it were out of a burning." And one of the Greek orators tells us, That "to save a man out of "the fire, was a common proverbial speech," *Aristides.*

From the words thus explained, the observation that naturally ariseth is this, That men may hold all the fundamentals of Christian religion, and yet may superadd other things, whereby they may greatly endanger their salvation. What those things were which some among the Corinthians built upon the foundation of Christianity, whereby they endangered their salvation, we may probably conjecture by what the Apostle reproves in this epistle, as the tolerating of incestuous marriages, communicating in idol-feasts, &c.; and especially

eſpecially by the doctrine of the falſe apoſtles, who at that time did ſo much diſturb the peace of moſt Chriſtian churches, and who are ſo often and ſo ſeverely reflected upon in this epiſtle. And what their doctrine was, we have an account, Acts xv. *viz.* that they impoſed upon the Gentile Chriſtians circumciſion, and the obſervation of the Jewiſh law, teaching, that *unleſs they were circumciſed, and kept the law of Moſes, they could not be ſaved.* So that they did not only build theſe doctrines upon Chriſtianity, but they made them equal with the foundation, ſaying, that *unleſs men believed* and practiſed ſuch things, *they could not be ſaved.*

In ſpeaking to this obſervation, I ſhall reduce my diſcourſe to theſe two heads.

1. I ſhall preſent to you ſome doctrines and practices which have been built upon the foundation of Chriſtianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens ſalvation: and, to be plain, I mean particularly the church of Rome.

2. I ſhall inquire, whether our granting a poſſibility of ſalvation, though with great hazard, to thoſe in the communion of the Roman church, and their denying it to us, be a reaſonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himſelf to that church.

And there is the more reaſon to conſider theſe things, when ſo many ſeducing ſpirits are ſo active and buſy to pervert men from the truth, and when we ſee every day ſo many men and their religion ſo eaſily parted. For this reaſon theſe two conſiderations ſhall be the ſubject of the following diſcourſe.

Firſt, We will conſider ſome doctrines and practices which the church of Rome hath built upon the foundation of Chriſtianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens ſalvation. It is not denied by the moſt judicious Proteſtants, but that the church of Rome do hold all the articles of the Chriſtian faith which are neceſſary to ſalvation; but that which we charge upon them, as a juſt ground of our ſeparation from them, is, the impoſing of new doctrines and practices upon Chriſtians as neceſſary to ſalvation, which were never taught by our Saviour or his Apoſtles; and which are either directly contrary to the

the doctrine of Chriſtianity, or too apparently deſtructive of a good life. And I begin,

I. With their doctrines. And becauſe I have no mind to aggravate leſſer matters, I will ſingle out four or five points of doctrine, which they have added to the Chriſtian religion, and which were neither taught by our Saviour and his Apoſtles, nor owned in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity. And the

Firſt which I ſhall mention, and which, being once admitted, makes way for as many errors as they pleaſe to bring in, is, their doctrine of infallibility. And this they are very ſtiff and peremptory in, though they are not agreed among themſelves where this infallibility is ſeated; whether in the Pope alone, or a council alone, or in both together, or in the diffuſive body of Chriſtians. But they are ſure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice againſt it? Can any man think, that this privilege was at firſt conferred upon the church of Rome, and that Chriſtians in all ages did believe it, and had conſtant recourſe to it for determining their differences; and yet that that very church, which hath enjoyed and uſed it ſo long, ſhould now be at a loſs where to find it? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there ſhould be ſuch differences among them about that which they pretend to be the only means of ending all differences.

There is not the leaſt intimation in ſcripture of this privilege conferred upon the Roman church; nor do the Apoſtles, in all their epiſtles, ever ſo much as give the leaſt direction to Chriſtians to appeal to the Biſhop of Rome for a determination of the many differences which even in thoſe times happened among them. And it is ſtrange they ſhould be ſo ſilent in this matter, when there were ſo many occaſions to ſpeak of it. If our Saviour had plainly appointed ſuch an infallible judge of controverſies for this very end, to decide the differences that ſhould happen among Chriſtians, it is ſtrange that the ancient fathers, in their diſputes with hereticks, ſhould never appeal to this judge: nay, it is ſtrange they ſhould not conſtantly do it in all caſes, it being ſo ſhort and expedite a way for the ending of controverſies.

verſies. And this very conſideration to a wiſe man is inſtead of a thouſand arguments, to ſatisfy him, that in thoſe times no ſuch thing was believed in the world.

Now, this doctrine of infallibility, if it be not true, is of ſo much the more pernicious conſequence to Chriſtianity, becauſe the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it, in all their other errors, and gives them a pretence of aſſuming an authority to themſelves to impoſe their own fancies and miſtakes upon the whole Chriſtian world.

2. Their doctrine about repentance, which conſiſts in confeſſing their ſins to the prieſt; which, if it be but accompanied with any degree of contrition, does, upon abſolution received from the prieſt, put them into a ſtate of ſalvation, though they have lived the moſt lewd and debauched lives that can be imagined. Than which nothing can be more plainly deſtructive of a good life: for, if this be true, all the hazard that the moſt wicked man runs of his ſalvation, is only the danger of ſo ſudden a death, as gives him no ſpace for confeſſion and abſolution: A caſe that happens ſo rarely, that any man that is ſtrongly addicted to his luſts, will be content to venture his ſalvation upon this hazard; and all the arguments to a good life will be very inſignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when remiſſion of ſins may be had upon ſuch cheap terms.

3. The doctrine of purgatory: by which they mean an eſtate of temporary puniſhments after this life, from which men may be releaſed, and tranſlated into heaven, by the prayers of the living, and the ſacrifice of the maſs. That this doctrine was not known in the primitive church, nor can be proved from ſcripture, we have the free acknowledgment of as learned and eminent men as any of that church; which is to acknowledge, that it is a ſuperſtructure upon the Chriſtian religion. And though in one ſenſe it be indeed a building of gold and ſilver upon the foundation of Chriſtianity, conſidering the vaſt revenues which this doctrine, and that of indulgences, which depends upon it, brings into that church; yet I doubt not but, in the Apoſtle's ſenſe, it will be found to be hay and ſtubble. But how

groundleſs ſoever it be, it is too gainful a doctrine to be eaſily parted withal.

4. The doctrine of tranſubſtantiation. A hard word; but I would to God that were the worſt of it: the thing is much more difficult. I have taken ſome pains to conſider other religions that have been in the world, and I muſt freely declare, that I never yet, in any of them, met with any article or propoſition, impoſed upon the belief of men, half ſo unreaſonable, and hard to be believed, as this is: and yet this, in the Romiſh church, is eſteemed one of the moſt principal articles of the Chriſtian faith; though there is no more certain foundation for it in ſcripture, than for our Saviour's being ſubſtantially changed into all thoſe things which are ſaid of him, as that he is a rock, a vine, a door, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This doctrine hath not only no certain foundation in ſcripture, but I have a far heavier charge againſt it; namely, that it undermines the very foundation of Chriſtianity itſelf. And, ſurely, nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the Chriſtian doctrine, which deſtroys the reaſon of our belief of the whole. And that this doctrine does ſo, will appear evidently, if we conſider what was the main argument which the Apoſtles uſed to convince the world of the truth of Chriſtianity; and that was this, That our bleſſed Saviour, the author of this doctrine, wrought ſuch and ſuch miracles; and particularly, that he roſe again from the dead. And this they proved, becauſe they were eye-witneſſes of his miracles, and had ſeen him, and converſed with him, after he was riſen from the dead. But what if their ſenſes did deceive them in this matter? then it cannot be denied, but that the main proof of Chriſtianity falls to the ground.

Well! we will now ſuppoſe, as the church of Rome does, tranſubſtantiation to have been one principal part of the Chriſtian doctrine which the Apoſtles preached. But if this doctrine be true, then all mens ſenſes are deceived in a plain ſenſible matter, wherein it is as hard for them to be deceived, as in any thing in the world: for two things can hardly be imagined more different, than a little bit of wafer, and the whole body of a man. So

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that the Apoſtles perſuading men to believe this doctrine, perſuaded them not to truſt their ſenſes; and yet the argument which they uſed to perſuade them to this, was built upon the direct contrary principle, That mens ſenſes are to be truſted. For if they be not, then, notwithſtanding all the evidence the Apoſtles offered for the reſurrection of our Saviour, he might not be riſen; and ſo the faith of Chriſtians was vain. So that they repreſent the Apoſtles as abſurd as is poſſible, *viz.* going about to perſuade men out of their ſenſes by virtue of an argument, the whole ſtrength whereof depends upon the certainty of ſenſe.

And now the matter is brought to a fair iſſue. If the teſtimony of ſenſe be to be relied upon, then tranſubſtantiation is falſe; if it be not, then no man is ſure that Chriſtianity is true. For the utmoſt aſſurance that the Apoſtles had of the truth of Chriſtianity, was the teſtimony of their own ſenſes concerning our Saviour's miracles; and this teſtimony every man hath againſt tranſubſtantiation. From whence it plainly follows, that no man, no not the Apoſtles themſelves, had more reaſon to believe Chriſtianity to be true, than every man hath to believe tranſubſtantiation to be falſe. And we who did not ſee our Saviour's miracles, as the Apoſtles did, and have only a credible relation of them, but do ſee the ſacrament, have leſs evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, than of the falſhood of tranſubſtantiation.

But cannot God impoſe upon the ſenſes of men, and repreſent things to them otherwiſe than they are? Yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he doth this, are we not to believe him? Moſt certainly. But then, we ought to be aſſured that he hath made ſuch a revelation; which aſſurance no man can have, the certainty of ſenſe being taken away.

I ſhall preſs the buſineſs a little farther. Suppoſing the ſcripture to be a divine revelation, and that theſe words, *This is my body*, if they be in ſcripture, muſt neceſſarily be taken in the ſtrict and literal ſenſe; I aſk now, what greater evidence any man has, that theſe words, *This is my body*, are in the Bible, than every man has that the bread is not changed in the ſacrament? Nay, no man has ſomuch: for we have only the evidence of one ſenſe,

that theſe words are in the Bible; but that the bread is not changed, we have the concurring teſtimony of ſeveral of our ſenſes. In a word, if this be once admitted, that the ſenſes of all men are deceived in one of the moſt plain ſenſible matters that can be, there is no certain means left either to convey or prove a divine revelation to men; nor is there any way to confute the groſſeſt impoſtures in the world: for if the clear evidence of all mens ſenſes be not ſufficient for this purpoſe, let any man, if he can, find a better and more convincing argument.

5. I will inſtance but in one doctrine more; and that ſhall be, their doctrine of depoſing Kings in caſe of hereſy, and abſolving their ſubjects from their allegiance to them. And this is not a mere ſpeculative doctrine, but hath been put in practice many a time by the Biſhops of Rome; as every one knows that is verſed in hiſtory. For the troubles and confuſions which were occaſioned by this very thing, make up a good part of the hiſtory of ſeveral ages.

I hope no body expects that I ſhould take the pains to ſhew, that this was not the doctrine of our Saviour and his Apoſtles, nor of the primitive Chriſtians. The Papiſts are many of them ſo far from pretending this, that in ſome times and places, when it is not ſeaſonable and for their purpoſe, we have much ado to perſuade them, that ever it was their doctrine. But if tranſubſtantiation be their doctrine, this is: for they came both out of the ſame forge, I mean the council of Lateran, under Pope Innocent III. And if, as they tell us, tranſubſtantiation was then eſtabliſhed, ſo was this. And indeed one would think they were twins, and brought forth at the ſame time; they are ſo like one another, both of them ſo monſtrouſly unreaſonable.

II. I come now, in the ſecond place, to conſider ſome practices of the church of Rome, which I am afraid will prove as bad as her doctrines. I ſhall inſtance in theſe five.

1. Their celebrating of their divine ſervice in an unknown tongue; and that not only contrary to the practice of the primitive church, and to the great end and deſign of religious worſhip, which is, the edification of thoſe who are concerned in it, and it is hard to imagine

gine how men can be edified by what they do not understand; but likewiſe in direct contradiction to St. Paul, who hath no leſs than a whole chapter, wherein he confutes this practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly, as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible. And they that can have the face to maintain, that this practice was not condemned by St. Paul, or that it was allowed and uſed in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, need not be aſhamed to ſet up for the defence of any paradox in the world.

2. The communion in one kind; and that notwithſtanding that, even by their own acknowledgment, our Saviour inſtituted it in both kinds, and the primitive church adminiſtered it in both kinds. This, I muſt acknowledge, is no addition to Chriſtianity, but a ſacrilegious taking away of an eſſential part of the ſacrament. For the cup is as eſſential a part of the inſtitution as the bread; and they might as well, and by the ſame authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

3. Their worſhipping of images. Which practice, notwithſtanding all their diſtinctions about it, which are no other but what the Heathens uſed in the ſame caſe, is as point blank againſt the ſecond commandment, as a deliberate and malicious killing of a man is againſt the ſixth. But if the caſe be ſo plain, a man would think, that at leaſt the teachers and guides of that church ſhould be ſenſible of it. Why, they are ſo; and afraid the people ſhould be ſo too: and therefore, in their ordinary catechiſms, and manuals of devotion, they leave out the ſecond commandment, and divide the tenth into two, to make up the number; leſt, if the common people ſhould know it, their conſciences ſhould ſtart at the doing of a thing ſo directly contrary to the plain command of God.

4. The worſhipping of the bread and wine in the euchariſt, out of a falſe and groundleſs perſuaſion, that they are ſubſtantially changed into the body and blood of Chriſt. Which if it be not true, and it hath good fortune if it be, for certainly it is one of the moſt incredible things in the whole world; then, by the confeſſion of ſeveral of their own learned writers, they are guilty of groſs idolatry.

5. The worſhip and invocation of ſaints and angels;

and particularly of the Virgin Mary; which hath now for ſome ages been a principal part of their religion. Now, a man may juſtly wonder that ſo conſiderable a part of religion as they make this to be, ſhould have no manner of foundation in the ſcripture. Does our Saviour any where ſpeak one word concerning the worſhipping of her? Nay, does he not take all occaſions to reſtrain all extravagant apprehenſions and imaginations concerning honour due to her, as foreſeeing the degeneracy of the church in this thing? When he was told, that his mother and brethren were without; *Who* (ſays he) *are my mother and my brethren? He that doth the will of my Father, the ſame is my mother, and ſiſter, and brother.* And when the woman brake forth into that rapture concerning the bleſſed mother of our Lord, *Bleſſed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee ſuck!* our Saviour diverts to another thing: *Yea rather, bleſſed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.* Does either our Saviour or his Apoſtles, in all their particular precepts and directions concerning prayer, and the manner of it, and by whom we are to addreſs ourſelves to God, give the leaſt intimation of praying to the Virgin Mary, or making uſe of her mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the practice of the church from the beginning, our Saviour and his Apoſtles would have been ſo ſilent about ſo conſiderable a part of religion; inſomuch that in all the epiſtles of the Apoſtles I do not remember that her name is ſo much as once mentioned? And yet the worſhip of her is at this day in the church of Rome, and hath been ſo for ſeveral ages, a main part of their publick worſhip, yea and of their private devotions too; in which it is uſual with them to ſay ten *Ave Maries* for one *Pater noſter*; that is, for one prayer they make to almighty God, they make ten addreſſes to the bleſſed Virgin; for that is the proportion obſerved in their roſaries. He that conſiders this, and had never ſeen the Bible, would have been apt to think that there had been more ſaid concerning her in ſcripture, than either concerning God, or our bleſſed Saviour; and that the New Teſtament were full from one end to the other of precepts and exhortations to the worſhipping of her: and yet, when all is done, I challenge any man to ſhew

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me ſo much as one ſentence in the whole Bible that ſounds that way. And there is as little in the Chriſtian writers of the firſt three hundred years. The truth is, this practice began to creep in among ſome ſuperſtitious people about the middle of the fourth century. And I remember particularly, that Epiphanius, who lived about that time, calls it the hereſy of the women.

And thus I have given you ſome inſtances of ſeveral doctrines and practices which the church of Rome hath built upon the foundation of Chriſtianity. Much more might have been ſaid of them; but from what hath been ſaid, any man may eaſily diſcern how dangerous they are to the ſalvation of men.

Secondly, I now proceed, in the ſecond place, to conſider, whether our granting a poſſibility of ſalvation, though with great hazard, to thoſe in the communion of the Roman church, and their denying it to us, be a ſufficient argument and encouragement to any man, to quit our church, and go to theirs. And there is the more need to conſider this, becauſe this is the great popular argument wherewith the emiſſaries and agents of that church are wont to aſſault our people. "Your "church (ſay they) grants that a Papiſt may be ſaved; "ours denies that a Proteſtant can be ſaved: therefore "it is ſafeſt to be of our church, in which ſalvation, by "the acknowledgment of both ſides, is poſſible."

For anſwer to this, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that this is ſo far from being a good argument, that it is ſo intolerably weak and ſophiſtical, that any conſiderate man ought to be aſhamed to be catched by it. For either it is good of itſelf, and ſufficient to perſuade a man to relinquiſh our church, and to paſs over to theirs, without entering into the merits of the cauſe on either ſide, and without comparing the doctrines and practices of both the churches together; or it is not. If it be not ſufficient of itſelf to perſuade a man to leave our church, without comparing the doctrines on both ſides, then it is to no purpoſe, and there is nothing got by it: for if, upon examination and comparing of doctrines, the one appear to be true, and the other falſe; this alone is a ſufficient inducement to any man, to cleave to that church

church where the true doctrine is found; and then there is no need of this argument.

If it be said, that this argument is good in itself, without the examination of the doctrines of both churches; this seems a very strange thing, for any man to affirm, That it is reason enough to a man to be of any church, whatever her doctrines and practices be, if she do but damn those that differ from her, and if the church that differs from her do but allow a possibility of salvation in her communion.

But they who use this argument, pretend that it is sufficient of itself; and therefore I shall apply myself, to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable weakness and insufficiency of it to satisfy any man's conscience, or prudence, to change his religion. And, to this end, I shall,

1. Shew the weakness of the principle upon which this argument relies.

2. Give some parallel instances, by which it will clearly appear, that it concludes false.

3. I shall take notice of some gross absurdities that follow from it.

4. Shew how unfit it is to work upon those to whom it is propounded. And,

5. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

1. I shall shew the weakness of the principle upon which this argument relies; and that is this, That whatever different parties in religion agree in, is safest to be chosen. The true consequence of which principle, if it be driven to the head, is, to persuade men to forsake Christianity, and to make them take up in the principles of natural religion; for in these all religions do agree. For, if this principle be true, and signify any thing, it is dangerous to embrace any thing wherein the several parties in religion differ; because that only is safe and prudent to be chosen wherein all agree. So that this argument, if the foundation of it be good, will persuade farther than those who make use of it desire it should do; for it will not only make men forsake the Protestant religion, but Popery too; and, which is much more considerable, Christianity itself.

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2. I will give ſome parallel inſtances, by which it will clearly be ſeen that this argument concludes falſe. The Donatiſts denied the baptiſm of the Catholicks to be good, but the Catholicks acknowledged the baptiſm of the Donatiſts to be valid; ſo that both ſides were agreed, that the baptiſm of the Donatiſts was good: therefore the ſafeſt way for St. Auſtin, and other Catholicks, according to this argument, was, to be baptized again by the Donatiſts; becauſe, by the acknowledgment of both ſides, baptiſm among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the church of Rome: Several in that church hold the perſonal infallibility of the Pope, and the lawfulneſs of depoſing and killing Kings for hereſy, to be *de fide*; that is, neceſſary articles of faith; and, conſequently, that whoever does not believe them cannot be ſaved. But a great many Papiſts, though they believe theſe things to be no matters of faith, yet they think thoſe that hold them may be ſaved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now, according to this argument, they ought all to be of their opinion in theſe points: becauſe both ſides are agreed, that they that hold them may be ſaved; but one ſide poſitively ſays, that men cannot be ſaved if they do not hold them.

But my text furniſhes me with as good an inſtance to this purpoſe as can be deſired. St. Paul, here in the text, acknowledgeth the poſſibility of the ſalvation of thoſe who built hay and ſtubble upon the foundation of Chriſtianity; that they might be ſaved, though with great difficulty, and as it were out of the fire. But now, among thoſe builders with hay and ſtubble, there were thoſe who denied the poſſibility of St. Paul's ſalvation, and of thoſe who were of his mind. We are told of ſome who built the Jewiſh ceremonies and obſervances upon the foundation of Chriſtianity; and ſaid, that unleſs men were circumciſed, and kept the law of Moſes, they could not be ſaved. So that, by this argument, St. Paul, and his followers, ought to have gone over to thoſe Judaizing Chriſtians; becauſe it was acknowledged on both ſides, that they might be ſaved. But theſe Judaizing Chriſtians were as uncharitable to St. Paul, and other Chriſtians, as the church of Rome is now to us; for

for they said positively, that they could not be saved. But can any man think, that St. Paul would have been moved, by this argument, to leave a safe and certain way of salvation, for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The argument you see is the very same; and yet it concludes the wrong way: which plainly shews, that it is a contingent argument, and concludes uncertainly, and by chance; and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

3. I shall take notice of some gross absurdities that follow from it. I shall mention but these two.

1st, According to this principle, it is always safest to be on the uncharitable side: and yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true Christian, or a true church, as a man would wish. Charity is one of the most essential marks of Christianity; and what the Apostle saith of particular Christians, is as true of whole churches, *that though they have all faith; yet if they have not charity, they are nothing.*

I grant that no charity teacheth men to see others damned, and not to tell them the danger of their condition. But it is to be considered, that the damning of men is a very hard thing; and therefore whenever we do it, the case must be wonderfully plain. And is it so in this matter? They of the church of Rome cannot deny, but that we embrace all the doctrines of our Saviour contained in the Apostles creed, and determined by the four first general councils; and yet they will not allow this, and a good life, to put us within a possibility of salvation, because we will not submit to all the innovations they would impose upon us. And yet I think there is scarce any doctrine or practice in difference between them and us, which some or other of their most learned writers have not acknowledged, either not to be sufficiently contained in scripture, or not to have been held and practised by the primitive church: so that nothing can excuse their uncharitableness towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this argument; for they do what in them lies to make themselves no Christians, that they may prove themselves the truer and more Christian church: A medium which we do not desire to make use of.

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2*dly*, If this argument were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world to agree with him in an error which another does not account damnable, whatever it be, provided he do but damn all thoſe that do not hold it; and there wants nothing but confidence and uncharitableneſs to do this. But is there any ſenſe, that another man's boldneſs, and want of charity, ſhould be an argument to move me to be of his opinion? I cannot illuſtrate this better, than by the difference between a ſkilful phyſician and a mountebank. A learned and a ſkilful phyſician is modeſt, and ſpeaks juſtly of things: he ſays, that ſuch a method of cure which he hath directed is ſafe; and withal, that that which the mountebank preſcribes, may poſſibly do the work, but there is great hazard and danger in it. But the mountebank, who never talks of any thing leſs than infallible cures, and always the more mountebank, the ſtronger pretence to infallibility; he is poſitive, that that method which the phyſician preſcribes, will deſtroy the patient; but his receipt is infallible, and never fails. Is there any reaſon in this caſe, that this man ſhould carry it merely by his confidence? And yet, if this argument be good, the ſafeſt way is, to reject the phyſician's advice, and to ſtick to the mountebank's: for both ſides are agreed, that there is a poſſibility of cure in the mountebank's method, but not in the phyſician's. And ſo the whole force of the argument lies in the confidence of an ignorant man.

4. This argument is very unfit to work upon thoſe to whom it is propounded. For either they believe we ſay true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reaſon to be moved by what we ſay. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we ſay in this matter; namely, that though it be poſſible for ſome in the communion of the Roman church to be ſaved, yet it is very hazardous; and that they are in a ſafe condition already in our church? And why then ſhould a bare poſſibility, accompanied with infinite and apparent hazard, be an argument to any man to run into that danger?

5. Laſtly, This argument is very improper to be urged by thoſe who make uſe of it. Half of the ſtrength of

of it lies in this, that we Proteſtants acknowledge, that it is poſſible a Papiſt may be ſaved. But why ſhould they lay any ſtreſs upon this? What matter is it what we hereticks ſay, who are ſo damnably miſtaken in all other things? Methinks, if there were no other reaſon, yet becauſe we ſay it, it ſhould ſeem to them to be unlikely to be true. But I perceive, when it ſerves for their purpoſe, we have ſome little credit and authority among them.

By this time I hope every one is in ſome meaſure ſatisfied of the weakneſs of this argument; which is ſo tranſparent, that no wiſe man can honeſtly uſe it, and he muſt have a very odd underſtanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is a caſual and contingent argument; and ſometimes it concludes right, and oftener wrong: and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one caſe, when all things are ſo equal on both ſides, that there is nothing elſe in the whole world to determine him; which ſurely can never happen in matters of religion neceſſary to be believed. No man is ſo weak, as not to conſider, in the change of his religion, the merits of the cauſe itſelf; as not to examine the doctrines and practices of the churches on both ſides; as not to take notice of the confidence and charity of both parties, together with all other things which ought to move a conſcientious and a prudent man. And if, upon inquiry, there appear to be a clear advantage on either ſide, then this argument is needleſs, and comes too late; becauſe the work is already done without it.

Beſides that the great hazard of ſalvation in the Roman church, which we declare upon account of the doctrines and practices which I have mentioned, ought to deter any man much more from that religion, than the acknowledged poſſibility of ſalvation in it ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it. Never did any Chriſtian church build ſo much hay and ſtubble upon the foundation of Chriſtianity; and therefore thoſe that are ſaved in it, muſt be ſaved, as it were out of the fire. And though purgatory be not meant in the text, yet it is a doctrine very well ſuited to their manner of building; for there is need of an *ignis purgatorius*, of a fire to try their work what it is, and to burn up their hay and ſtubble.

ble. And I have so much charity, and I desire always to have it, as to hope, that a great many among them, who lived piously, and have been almost inevitably detained in that church, by the prejudice of education, and an invincible ignorance, will, upon a general repentance, find mercy with God: and though their works suffer loss, and be burnt; yet they themselves may escape, as out of the fire. But as for those who had the opportunities of coming to the knowledge of the truth, if they continue in the errors of that church, or apostatise from the truth, I think their condition so far from being safe, that there must be extraordinary favourable circumstances in their case, to give a man hopes of their salvation.

I have now done with the two things I propounded to speak to. And I am sorry that the necessary defence of our religion, against the restless importunities and attempts of our adversaries upon all sorts of persons, hath engaged me to spend so much time in matters of dispute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witnesses, that I have constantly made it my business, in this great presence and assembly, to plead against the impieties and wickedness of men; and have endeavoured, by the best arguments I could think of, to gain men over to a firm belief and serious practice of the main things of religion. And I do assure you, I had much rather persuade any one to be a good man, than to be of any party or denomination of Christians whatsoever: for I doubt not, but the belief of the ancient creed, provided we entertain nothing that is destructive of it, together with a good life, will certainly save a man; and without this no man can have reasonable hopes of salvation, no not in an infallible church, if there were any such to be found in the world.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent observer of the genius and humour of the several sects and professions in religion; and, upon the whole matter, I do in my conscience believe the church of England to be the best constituted church this day in the world; and that, as to the main, the doctrine, and government, and worship of it, are excellently framed to make men soberly religious; securing men, on the one hand, from the wild freaks of enthusiasm; and, on

the other, from the groſs follies of ſuperſtition. And our church hath this peculiar advantage above ſeveral profeſſions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and juſt ſubordination to the civil authority, and hath always been untainted in its loyalty.

And now, ſhall every trifling conſideration be ſufficient to move a man to relinquiſh ſuch a church? There is no greater diſparagement to a man's underſtanding, no greater argument of a light and ungenerous mind, than raſhly to change one's religion. Religion is our greateſt concernment of all other; and it is not every little argument, no, nor a great noiſe about infallibility, nothing but very plain and convincing evidence, that ſhould ſway a man in this caſe. But they are utterly inexcuſable who make a change of ſuch concernment upon the inſinuations of one ſide only, without ever hearing what can be ſaid for the church they were baptized and brought up in before they leave it. They that can yield thus eaſily to the impreſſions of every one that hath a deſign and intereſt to make proſelytes, may, at this rate of diſcretion, change their religion twice a-day; and, inſtead of morning and evening prayer, they may have a morning and evening religion. Therefore, for God's ſake, and for our own ſouls ſake, and for the ſake of our reputation, let us conſider, and *ſhew ourſelves men*. Let us not ſuffer ourſelves to be ſhaken and carried away with every wind. Let us not run ourſelves into danger when we may be ſafe. Let us ſtick to the foundation of religion, the articles of our common belief, and build upon them gold, and ſilver, and precious ſtones; I mean, the virtues and actions of a good life: and, if we would do this, we ſhould not be apt to ſet ſuch a value upon hay and ſtubble. If we would ſincerely endeavour to live holy and virtuous lives, we ſhould not need to caſt about for a religion which may furniſh us with eaſy and indirect ways to get to heaven.

I will conclude all with the Apoſtle's exhortation: *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*

Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great ſhepherd of the ſheep,

by

by the blood of the everlaſting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleaſing in his ſight, through Jeſus Chriſt; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XII.

Of the inward peace and pleaſure which attends religion.

PSAL. CXIX. 165.

Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing ſhall offend them.

IN theſe words there are two things contained; the deſcription of a good man, and the reward of his goodneſs.

1. The deſcription of a good man: He is ſaid to be one that *loves the law* of God; that is, that loves to meditate upon it, and to practiſe it.

2. The reward of his goodneſs: *Great peace have they that love thy law.* The word *peace* is many times uſed in ſcripture in a very large ſenſe, ſo as to comprehend all kind of happineſs. Sometimes it ſignifies outward peace and quiet, in oppoſition to war and contention; and ſometimes inward peace and contentment, in oppoſition to inward trouble and anguiſh. I underſtand the text chiefly in this laſt ſenſe, not wholly excluding either of the other.

My deſign at preſent from theſe words is, to recommend religion to men, from the conſideration of that inward peace and pleaſure which attends it. And ſurely nothing can be ſaid more to the advantage of religion, in the opinion of conſiderate men, than this. For the aim of all philoſophy, and the great ſearch of wiſe men, hath been how to attain peace and tranquillity of mind.

And if religion be able to give this, a greater commendation need not be given to religion.

But before I enter upon this argument, I ſhall premiſe two things by way of caution.

1. That theſe kind of obſervations are not to be taken too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, as if they never failed in any one inſtance. Ariſtotle obſerved long ſince, that moral and proverbial ſayings are underſtood to be true generally and for the moſt part; and that is all the truth that is to be expected in them. As, when Solomon ſays, *Train up a child in the way wherein he ſhould go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it;* this is not to be ſo taken, as if no child that is piouſly educated did ever miſcarry afterwards; but that the good education of children is the beſt way to make good men, and commonly approved to be ſo by experience. So here, when it is ſaid, that *great peace have they that love God's law;* the meaning is, that religion hath generally this effect, though in ſome caſes, and as to ſome perſons, it may be accidentally hindered.

2. When I ſay that religion gives peace and tranquillity to our minds, this is chiefly to be underſtood of a religious ſtate in which a man is well ſettled and confirmed, and not of our firſt entrance into it; for that is more or leſs troubleſome according as we make it. If we begin a religious courſe betimes, before we have contracted any great guilt, and before the habits of ſin be grown ſtrong in us, the work goes on eaſily, without any great conflict or reſiſtance. But the caſe is otherwiſe, when a man breaks off from a wicked life, and becomes religious, from the direct contrary courſe in which he hath been long and deeply engaged. In this caſe no man is ſo unreaſonable as to deny, that there is a great deal of ſenſible trouble and difficulty in the making of this change; but when it is once made, peace and comfort will ſpring up by degrees, and daily increaſe, as we grow more confirmed and eſtabliſhed in a good courſe.

Theſe two things being premiſed, I ſhall now endeavour to ſhew, that religion gives a man the greateſt pleaſure and ſatisfaction of mind; and that there is no true peace, nor any comparable pleaſure to be had in a contrary courſe: and that from theſe two heads; from teſtimony of ſcripture; and from the nature of religion,

which

which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind.

First, From teſtimony of ſcripture. I ſhall ſelect ſome of thoſe texts which are more full and expreſs to this purpoſe. Job xxii. 21. ſpeaking of God, *Acquaint thyſelf now with him, and be at peace. To acquaint ourſelves with God*, is a phraſe of the ſame importance with *coming to God*, and *ſeeking of him*, and many other like expreſſions in ſcripture, which ſignify nothing elſe but to become religious. Pſal. xxxvii. 37. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.* Or, as theſe words are rendered according to the LXX. in our old tranſlation, *Keep innocency, take heed to the thing that is right: for that ſhall bring thee peace at the laſt.* Prov. iii. 17. where Solomon, ſpeaking of wiſdom, which with him is but another name for religion, ſays, *Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.* Iſ. xxxii. 17. *The work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.* Matth. xi. 28. 29. *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt.* Now, *to come to Chriſt*, is to become his diſciples; to believe and practiſe his doctrine; for ſo our Saviour explains himſelf in the next words: *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; and ye ſhall find reſt for your ſouls.* Rom. ii. 10. *Glory, and honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good.*

And, on the contrary, the ſcripture repreſents the condition of a ſinner to be full of trouble and diſquiet. David, though he was a very good man, yet when he had grievouſly offended God, the anguiſh of his mind was ſuch, as even to diſorder and diſtemper his body: Pſal. xxxviii. 2. 3. 4. *Thine arrows ſtick faſt in me, and thy hand preſſeth me ſore. There is no ſoundneſs in my fleſh, becauſe of thine anger: neither is there any reſt in my bones, becauſe of my ſin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: and as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.* Iſ. lvii. 20. 21. *The wicked are like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt. There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.* And Iſ. lix. 7. 8. *Miſery and deſtruction are in their paths; and the way of peace they know not: they have made themſelves crooked paths: whoſoever goeth therein, ſhall not*

know peace. Rom. ii. 9. *Tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil.*

You ſee how full and expreſs the ſcripture is in this matter. I come now in the

Second place, To give you a more particular account of this from the nature of religion, which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind. And that I ſhall do in theſe three particulars.

1. Religion is apt to remove the chief cauſes of inward trouble and diſquiet.

2. It furniſhes us with all the true cauſes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

3. The reflexion upon a religious courſe of life, and all the actions of it, doth afterwards yield great pleaſure and ſatisfaction.

I. Religion is apt to remove the chief cauſes of inward trouble and diſquiet. The chief cauſes of inward trouble and diſcontent are theſe two: doubting, and anxiety of mind; and guilt of conſcience. Now, religion is apt to free us from both theſe.

1. From doubting, and anxiety of mind. Irreligion and Atheiſm makes a man full of doubts and jealouſies, whether he be in the right, and whether at laſt things will not prove quite otherwiſe than he hath raſhly determined. For though a man endeavour never ſo much to ſettle himſelf in the principles of infidelity, and to perſuade his mind that there is no God, and, conſequently, that there are no rewards to be hoped for, nor puniſhments to be feared, in another life; yet he can never attain to a ſteddy and unſhaken perſuaſion of theſe things. And however he may pleaſe himſelf with witty reaſons againſt the common belief of mankind, and ſmart repartees to their arguments, and bold and pleaſant raillery about theſe matters; yet I dare ſay, no man ever ſat down in a clear and full ſatisfaction concerning them. For when he hath done all that he can to reaſon himſelf out of religion, his conſcience ever and anon recoils upon him; and his natural thoughts and apprehenſions riſe up againſt his reaſonings, and all his wit and ſubtilty is confuted and borne down by a ſecret and ſtrong ſuſpicion, which he can by no means get out of his mind, that things may be otherwiſe.

And

And the reaſon hereof is plain; becauſe all this is an endeavour againſt nature, and thoſe vigorous inſtincts which God hath planted in the minds of men to the contrary. For whenever our minds are free, and not violently hurried away by paſſion, nor blinded by prejudice, they do of themſelves return to their firſt and moſt natural apprehenſion of things. And this is the reaſon why, when the Atheiſt falls into any great calamity, and is awakened to an impartial conſideration of things by the apprehenſion of death and judgment, and deſpairs of enjoying any longer thoſe pleaſures for the ſake of which he hath all this while rebelled againſt religion, his courage preſently ſinks, and all his arguments fail him, and his caſe is now too ſerious to admit of jeſting, and at the bottom of his ſoul he doubts of all that which he aſſerted with ſo much confidence, and ſet ſo good a face upon before; and can find no eaſe to his mind, but in retreating from his former principles; nor no hopes of conſolation for himſelf, but in acknowledging that God whom he hath denied, and imploring his mercy whom he hath affronted.

This is always the caſe of theſe perſons when they come to extremity; not to mention the infinite checks and rebukes which their own minds give them upon other occaſions: ſo that it is very ſeldom that theſe men have any tolerable enjoyment of themſelves, but are forced to run away from themſelves into company, and to ſtupify themſelves by intemperance, that they may not feel the fearful twitches and gripings of their own minds.

Whereas he who entertains the principles of religion, and therein follows his own natural apprehenſions, and the general voice of mankind, and is not conſcious to himſelf that he knowingly and wilfully lives contrary to theſe principles, hath no anxiety in his mind about theſe things; being verily perſuaded they are true, and that he hath all the reaſon in the world to think ſo: and if they ſhould prove otherwiſe, which he hath no other cauſe to ſuſpect; yet he hath this ſatisfaction, that he hath taken the wiſeſt courſe, and hath conſulted his own preſent peace and future ſecurity infinitely better than the Atheiſt hath done, in caſe he ſhould prove to be miſtaken. For it is a fatal miſtake, to think there is no God, if

if there be one: but a miſtake on the other hand hath no future bad conſequences depending upon it, nor indeed any great preſent inconvenience; religion only reſtraining a man from doing ſome things, from moſt of which it is good he ſhould be reſtrained however. So that at the worſt the religious man is only miſtaken; but the Atheiſt is miſerable if he be miſtaken; miſerable beyond all imagination, and paſt all remedy.

2. Another, and indeed a principal cauſe of trouble and diſcontent to the minds of men, is guilt. Now, guilt is a conſciouſneſs to ourſelves that we have done amiſs; and the very thought that we have done amiſs, is apt to lie very croſs in our minds, and to cauſe great anguiſh and confuſion. Beſides that guilt is always attended with fear; which naturally ſprings up in the mind of man, from a ſecret apprehenſion of the miſchief and inconvenience that his ſin will bring upon him, and of the vengeance that hangs over him from God, and will overtake him either in this world, or in the other.

And though the ſinner, while he is in full health and proſperity, may make a ſhift to divert and ſhake off theſe fears; yet they frequently return upon him, and upon every little noiſe of danger, upon the apprehenſion of any calamity that comes near him, his guilty mind is preſently jealous that it is making towards him, and is particularly levelled againſt him. For he is ſenſible that there is a juſt power above him, to whoſe indignation he is continually liable, and therefore he is always in fear of him; and how long ſoever he may have eſcaped puniſhment in this world, he cannot but dread the vengeance of the other: and theſe thoughts are a continual diſturbance to his mind, and *in the midſt of laughter make his heart heavy;* and the longer he continues in a wicked courſe, the more he multiplies the grounds and cauſes of his fears.

But now religion frees a man from all this torment, either by preventing the cauſe of it, or directing to the cure; either by preſerving us from guilt, or clearing us of it in caſe we have contracted it. It preſerves us from guilt, by keeping us innocent; and in caſe we have offended, it clears us of it, by leading us to repentance, and the amendment of our lives; which is the only way

to

to recover the favour of God, and the peace of our own conſciences, and to ſecure us againſt all apprehenſion of danger from the divine juſtice; though not abſolutely from all fear of puniſhment in this world, yet from that which is the greateſt danger of all, the condemnation and torment of the world to come. And by this means a man's mind is ſettled in perfect peace, religion freeing him from thoſe tormenting fears of the divine diſpleaſure, which he can upon no other terms rid himſelf of; whereas the ſinner is always ſowing the ſeeds of trouble in his own mind, and laying a foundation of continual diſcontent to himſelf.

II. As religion removes the chief grounds of trouble and diſquiet, ſo it miniſters to us all the true cauſes of peace and tranquillity of mind. Whoever lives according to the rules of religion, lays theſe three great foundations of peace and comfort to himſelf.

1. He is ſatisfied, that in being religious he doth that which is moſt reaſonable.

2. That he ſecures himſelf againſt the greateſt miſchiefs and dangers, by making God his friend.

3. That, upon the whole matter, he does in all reſpects moſt effectually conſult and promote his own intereſt and happineſs.

1. He is ſatisfied that he does that which is moſt reaſonable. And it is no ſmall pleaſure to be juſtified to ourſelves; to be ſatisfied that we are what we ought to be, and do what in reaſon we ought to do; that which beſt becomes us, and which, according to the primitive intention of our being, is moſt natural; for whatever is natural is pleaſant. Now, the practice of piety towards God, and of every other grace and virtue which religion teaches us, are things reaſonable in themſelves, and what God, when he made us, intended we ſhould do. And a man is then pleaſed with himſelf, and his own actions, when he doth what he is convinced he ought to do; and is then offended with himſelf, when he goes againſt the light of his own mind, by neglecting his duty, or doing contrary to it: for then his conſcience checks him; and there is ſomething within him that is uneaſy, and puts him into diſorder; as when a man eats or drinks any thing that is unwholſome, it offends

ſends his ſtomach, and puts his body into an unnatural and a reſtleſs ſtate.

For every thing is then at reſt and peace, when it is in that ſtate in which nature intended it to be; and, being violently forced out of it, it is never quiet till it recover again. Now, religion, and the practice of its virtues, is the natural ſtate of the ſoul, the condition to which God deſigned it. As God made man a reaſonable creature, ſo all the acts of religion are reaſonable, and ſuitable to our nature; and our ſouls are then in health, when we are what the laws of religion require us to be, and do what they command us to do. And as we find an inexpreſſible eaſe and pleaſure when our body is in its perfect ſtate of health, and on the contrary every diſtemper cauſeth pain and uneaſineſs; ſo is it with the ſoul. When religion governs all our inclinations and actions, and the temper of our minds, and the courſe of our lives, is conformable to the precepts of it, all is at peace. But when we are otherwiſe, and live in any vitious practice, how can there be peace, ſo long as we act unreaſonably, and do thoſe things whereby we neceſſarily create trouble and diſturbance to ourſelves? How can we hope to be at eaſe ſo long as we are in a ſick and diſeaſed condition? Till the corruption that is in us be wrought out, our ſpirits will be in a perpetual tumult and fermentation; and it is as impoſſible for us to enjoy the peace and ſerenity of our minds, as it is for a ſick man to be at eaſe. The man may uſe what arts of diverſion he will, and change from one place and poſture to another; but ſtill he is reſtleſs, becauſe there is that within him which gives him pain and diſturbance. *There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.* Such men may diſſemble their condition, and put on the face and appearance of pleaſantneſs and contentment; but God, who ſees all the ſecrets of mens hearts, knows it is far otherwiſe with them: *There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.*

2. Another ground of peace which the religious man hath, is, that he hath made God his friend. Now, friendſhip is peace and pleaſure both. It is mutual love, and that is a double pleaſure: and it is hard to ſay which is the greateſt, the pleaſure of loving God, or of knowing that he loves us. Now, whoever ſincerely

cerely endeavours to please God, may rest perfectly assured that God hath no displeasure against him: for *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance shall behold the upright;* that is, he will be favourable to such persons. As *he hates the workers of iniquity,* so *he takes pleasure in them that fear him, in such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.*

And, being assured of his favour, we are secured against the greatest dangers and the greatest fears; and may say with David, *Return then unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* What can reasonably trouble or discontent that man who hath made his peace with God, and is restored to his favour, who is the best and most powerful friend, and can be the surest and most dangerous enemy in the whole world?

3. By being religious we do most effectually consult our own interest and happiness. A great part of religion consists in moderating our appetites and passions; and this naturally tends to the composure of our minds. He that lives piously and virtuously, acts according to reason; and in doing so maintains the present peace of his own mind; and not only so, but he lays the foundation of his future happiness to all eternity. For religion gives a man the hopes of eternal life; and all pleasure does not consist in present enjoyment: there is a mighty pleasure also in the firm belief and expectation of a future good; and, if it be a great and lasting good, it will support a man under a great many present evils. If religion be certainly the way to avoid the greatest evils, and to bring us to happiness at last, we may contentedly bear a great many afflictions for its sake: for though all suffering be grievous, yet it is pleasant to escape great dangers, and to come to the possession of a mighty good, though it be with great difficulty, and inconvenience to ourselves. And when we come to heaven, if ever we be so happy as to get thither, it will be a new and greater pleasure to us to remember the pains and troubles whereby we were saved, and made happy.

So that all these put together, are a firm foundation

on of peace and comfort to a good man. There is a great ſatisfaction in the very doing of our duty, and acting reaſonably, though there may happen to be ſome preſent trouble and inconvenience in it. But when we do not only ſatisfy ourſelves in ſo doing, but likewiſe pleaſe him whoſe favour is better than life, and whoſe frowns are more terrible than death; when in doing our duty we directly promote our own happineſs, and in ſerving God do moſt effectually ſerve our own intereſt; what can be imagined to miniſter more peace and pleaſure to the mind of man?

This is the ſecond thing. Religion furniſhes us with all the true cauſes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

III. The reflexion upon a religious and virtuous courſe of life, doth afterwards yield a mighty pleaſure and ſatisfaction. And what can commend religion more to us, than that the remembrance of any pious and virtuous action gives ſo much contentment and delight? So that whatever difficulty and reluctancy we may find in the doing of it, to be ſure there is peace and ſatisfaction in the looking back upon it. No man ever reflected upon himſelf with regret for having done his duty to God or man; for having lived ſoberly, or righteouſly, or godly in this preſent world. Nay, on the contrary, the conſcience of any duty faithfully diſcharged, the memory of any good we have done, does refreſh the ſoul with a ſtrange kind of pleaſure and joy: *Our rejoicing is this*, (ſaith St. Paul), *the teſtimony of our conſciences, that in all ſimplicity and godly ſincerity we have had our converſation in the world.*

But, on the other ſide, the courſe of a vitious life; all acts of impiety to God, of malice and injuſtice to men, of intemperance and exceſs in reference to ourſelves, do certainly leave a ſting behind them. And whatever pleaſure there may be in the preſent act of them, the memory of them is ſo tormenting, that men are glad to uſe all the arts of diverſion to fence off the thoughts of them. One of the greateſt troubles in the world to a bad man, is to look into himſelf, and to remember how he hath lived. I appeal to the conſciences of men whether this be not true.

And is not here now a mighty difference between

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theſe two courſes of life; that when we do any thing that is good, if there be any trouble in it, it is ſoon over, but the pleaſure of it is perpetual; when we do a wicked action, the pleaſure of it is ſhort and tranſient, but the trouble and ſting of it remains for ever? The reflexion upon the good we have done, gives a laſting ſatisfaction to our minds; but the remembrance of any evil committed by us, leaves a perpetual diſcontent.

And, which is yet more conſiderable, a religious and virtuous courſe of life does then yield moſt peace and comfort when we moſt ſtand in need of it; in times of affliction, and at the hour of death. When a man falls into any great calamity, there is no comfort in the world like to that of a good conſcience. This makes all calm and ſerene within, when there is nothing but clouds and darkneſs about him. So David obſerves of the good man, Pſal. cxii. 4. *Unto the upright there ariſeth light in darkneſs.* All the pious and virtuous actions that we do, are ſo many ſeeds of peace and comfort, ſown in our conſciences, which will ſpring up and flouriſh moſt in times of outward trouble and diſtreſs: *Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart.* And at the hour of death: *The righteous hath hope in his death,* ſaith Solomon. And what a ſeaſonable refreſhment is it to the mind of man, when the pangs of death are ready to take hold of him, and he is juſt ſtepping into the other world, to be able to look back with ſatisfaction upon a religious and well-ſpent life? Then, if ever, the comforts of a good man do overflow, and a kind of heaven ſprings up in his mind, and he rejoiceth in the hopes of the glory of God. And that is a true and ſolid comfort indeed, which will ſtand by us in the day of adverſity, and ſtick cloſe to us when we have moſt need of it.

But with the ungodly it is not ſo. His guilt lies in wait for him, eſpecially againſt ſuch times; and is never more fierce and raging than in the day of diſtreſs: ſo that according as his troubles without are multiplied, ſo are his ſtings within. And ſurely affliction is then grievous indeed, when it falls upon a galled and uneaſy mind. Were it not for this, outward afflictions might

be tolerable: *The ſpirit of a man might bear his infirmities; but a wounded ſpirit who can bear?* But, eſpecially at the hour of death, how does the guilt of his wicked life then ſtare him in the face? what ſtorms and tempeſts are raiſed in his ſoul, which make it like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt? When eternity, that fearful and amazing ſight, preſents itſelf to his mind, and he feels himſelf ſinking into the regions of darkneſs, and is every moment in a fearful expectation of meeting with the juſt reward of his deeds; with what regret does he then remember the ſins of his life? and how full of rage and indignation is he againſt himſelf for having neglected to know, when he had ſo many opportunities of knowing them, the things that belong to his peace; and which, becauſe he hath neglected them, are now, and likely to be for ever, hid from his eyes?

And if this be the true caſe of the righteous and wicked man, I need not multiply words, but may leave it to any man's thoughts, in which of theſe conditions he would be. And ſurely the difference between them is ſo very plain, that there can be no difficulty in the choice.

But now, though this diſcourſe be very true, yet, for the full clearing of this matter, it will be but fair to conſider what may be ſaid on the other ſide; and the rather, becauſe there are ſeveral objections which ſeem to be countenanced from experience; which is enough to overthrow the moſt plauſible ſpeculation. As,

1. That wicked men ſeem to have a great deal of pleaſure and contentment in their vices.

2. That religion impoſeth many harſh and grievous things, which ſeem to be inconſiſtent with that pleaſure and ſatisfaction I have ſpoken of.

3. That thoſe who are religious, are many times very diſconſolate, and full of trouble.

To the firſt, I deny not that wicked men have ſome pleaſure in their vices; but when all things are rightly computed, and juſt abatements made, it will amount to very little. For it is the loweſt and meaneſt kind of pleaſure; it is chiefly the pleaſure of our bodies and our ſenſes, of our worſe part; the pleaſure of the beaſt, and not of the man; that which leaſt becomes us, and which we were leaſt of all made for. Thoſe ſenſual pleaſures which

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are lawful, are much inferior to the leaſt ſatisfaction of the mind; and when they are unlawful, they are always inconſiſtent with it. And *what is a man profited*, if, to gain a little ſenſual pleaſure, he loſe the peace of his ſoul? Can we find in our hearts to call that pleaſure which robs us of a far greater and higher ſatisfaction than it brings? The delights of ſenſe are ſo far from being the chief pleaſure which God deſigned us, that, on the contrary, he intended we ſhould take our chief pleaſure in the reſtraining and moderating of our ſenſual appetites and deſires, and in keeping them within the bounds of reaſon and religion.

And then, it is not a laſting pleaſure. Thoſe fits of mirth which wicked men have, how ſoon are they over? like a ſudden blaze, which, after a little flaſh and noiſe, is preſently gone. It is the compariſon of a very great and experienced man in theſe matters: *Like the crackling of thorns under a pot*, (ſaith Solomon), *ſo is the laughter of the fool*; that is, the mirth of the wicked man; it may be loud, but it laſts not.

But, which is moſt conſiderable of all, the pleaſures of ſin bear no proportion to that long and black train of miſeries and inconveniencies which they draw after them; many times poverty and reproach, pains and diſeaſes upon our bodies; *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil*. So that if theſe pleaſures were greater than they are, a man had better be without them than purchaſe them at ſuch dear rates.

To the ſecond, That religion impoſeth many harſh and grievous things, which ſeem to be inconſiſtent with that pleaſure and ſatisfaction I have ſpoken of; as, the bearing of perſecution, repentance and mortification, faſting and abſtinence, and many other rigours and ſeverities. As to perſecution, this diſcourſe doth not pretend that religion exempts men from outward troubles; but that, when they happen, it ſupports men under them better than any thing elſe. As for repentance and mortification; this chiefly concerns our firſt entrance into religion after a wicked life, which I acknowledged in the beginning of this diſcourſe to be very grievous: but this doth not hinder, but that though religion may be troubleſome at firſt to ſome perſons whoſe former ſins and crimes have

made it ſo, it may be pleaſant afterwards when we are accuſtomed to it. And whatever the trouble of repentance be, it is unavoidable, unleſs we reſolve to be miſerable; for *except we repent, we muſt periſh.* Now, there is always a rational ſatisfaction in ſubmitting to a leſs inconvenience to remedy and prevent a greater. As for faſting and abſtinence, which is many times very helpful and ſubſervient to the ends of religion; there is no ſuch extraordinary trouble in it, if it be diſcreetly managed, as is worth the ſpeaking of. And as for other rigours and ſeverities which ſome pretend religion does impoſe; I have only this to ſay, that if men will play the fool, and make religion more troubleſome than God hath made it, I cannot help that; and that this is a falſe repreſentation of religion which ſome in the world have made, as if it did chiefly conſiſt, not in pleaſing God, but in diſpleaſing and tormenting ourſelves. This is not to paint Religion like herſelf, but rather like one of the furies, with nothing but whips and ſnakes about her.

To the third, That thoſe who are religious, are many times very diſconſolate, and full of trouble; This, I confeſs, is a great objection indeed, if religion were the cauſe of this trouble. But there are other plain cauſes of it, to which religion rightly underſtood is not acceſſory; as, falſe and miſtaken principles in religion; the imperfection of our religion, and obedience to God; and a melancholy temper and diſpoſition. Falſe and miſtaken principles in religion; as this for one, That God does not ſincerely deſire the ſalvation of men, but hath from all eternity effectually barred the greateſt part of mankind from all poſſibility of attaining that happineſs which he offers to them; and every one hath cauſe to fear that he may be in that number. This were a melancholy conſideration indeed, if it were true; but there is no ground either from reaſon or ſcripture to entertain any ſuch thought of God. Our deſtruction is of ourſelves; and no man ſhall be ruined by any decree of God, who does not ruin himſelf by his own fault.

Or elſe, the imperfection of our religion, and obedience to God. Some perhaps are very devout in ſerving God, but not ſo kind and charitable, ſo juſt and honeſt in their dealings with men. No wonder if ſuch perſons

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be disquieted; the natural consciences of men being not more apt to disquiet them for any thing, than for the neglect of those moral duties which natural light teacheth them. Peace of conscience is the effect of an impartial and universal obedience to the laws of God; and I hope no man will blame religion for that which plainly proceeds from the want of religion.

Or, lastly, a melancholy temper and disposition; which is not from religion, but from our nature and constitution: and therefore religion ought not to be charged with it.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and plainly as I could, to represent to you what peace and pleasure, what comfort and satisfaction, religion rightly understood and sincerely practised is apt to bring to the minds of men. And I do not know by what sort of argument religion can be more effectually recommended to wise and considerate men. For, in persuading men to be religious, I do not go about to rob them of any true pleasure and contentment, but to direct them to the very best, nay indeed the only way of attaining and securing it.

I speak this in great pity and compassion to those who make it their great design to please themselves, but do grievously mistake the way to it. The direct way is that which I have set before you; a holy and virtuous life; *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world.* *A good man* (saith Solomon) *is satisfied from himself:* He hath the pleasure of being wise, and acting reasonably; the pleasure of being justified to himself in what he doth, and of being acquitted by the sentence of his own mind. There is a great pleasure in being innocent; because that prevents guilt and trouble. It is pleasant to be virtuous and good, because that is to excel many others; and it is pleasant to grow better, because that is to excel ourselves: nay it is pleasant even to mortify and subdue our lusts, because that is victory. It is pleasant to command our appetites and passions, and to keep them in due order, within the bounds of reason and religion; because this is a kind of empire, this is to govern. It is naturally pleasant to rule and have power over others; but he is the great and the absolute prince, who commands himself. This is *the kingdom of God within us;* a dominion infi-

nitely to be preferred before all *the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them.* It is the *kingdom of God* deſcribed by the Apoſtle, which conſiſts in *righteouſneſs, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghoſt.* In a word, the pleaſure of being good, and of doing good, is the chief happineſs of God himſelf.

But now, the wicked man deprives himſelf of all this pleaſure, and creates perpetual diſcontent to his own mind. O the torments of a guilty conſcience, which the ſinner feels more or leſs all his life long! But, alas! thou doſt not yet know the worſt of it, no not in this world. What wilt thou do when thou comeſt to die? What comfort wilt thou then be able to give thyſelf; or what comfort can any one elſe give thee, when thy conſcience is miſerably rent and torn by thoſe waking furies which will then rage in thy breaſt, and thou knoweſt not which way to turn thyſelf for eaſe? Then, perhaps, at laſt the prieſt is unwillingly ſent for, to patch up thy conſcience as well as he can, and to appeaſe the cries of it; and to force himſelf, out of very pity and good nature, to *ſay, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.* But, alas! man, what can we do? what comfort can we give thee, when thine iniquities teſtify againſt thee to thy very face? *How can there be peace,* when thy luſts and debaucheries, thy impieties to God, and thy injuries to men, have been ſo many? *How can there be peace,* when thy whole life hath been a continued contempt and provocation of almighty God, and a perpetual violence and affront to the light and reaſon of thy own mind?

Therefore whatever temptation there may be in ſin at a diſtance, whatever pleaſure in the act and commiſſion of it; yet remember, that it always goes off with trouble, and *will be bitterneſs in the end.* Thoſe words of Solomon have a terrible ſting in the concluſion of them, *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.*

This one thought, which will very often unavoidably break into our minds, that *God will bring us into judgment,* is enough to daſh all our contentment, and to ſpoil all the pleaſure of a ſinful life. Never expect to be quiet

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in thine own mind, and to have the true enjoyment of thyſelf, till thou liveſt a virtuous and religious life.

And if this diſcourſe be true, as I am confident I have every man's conſcience on my ſide; I ſay, if this be true, let us venture to be wiſe and happy; that is, to be religious. Let us reſolve to *break off our ſins by repentance; to fear God, and keep his commandments*, as ever we deſire to avoid the unſpeakable torments of a guilty mind, and would not be perpetually uneaſy to ourſelves.

Grant, we beſeech thee, almighty God, that we may every one of us *know* and do *in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes. And the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great ſhepherd of the ſheep, by the blood of the everlaſting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us always that which is well-pleaſing in his ſight, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

SERMON XIII.

The nature and benefit of conſideration.

PSAL. cxix. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.

THE two great cauſes of the ruin of men are, infidelity, and want of conſideration. Some do not believe the principles of religion; or at leaſt have, by arguing againſt them, rendered them ſo doubtful to themſelves, as to take away the force and efficacy of them. But theſe are but a very ſmall part of mankind, in compariſon of thoſe who periſh for want of conſidering theſe things: for moſt men take the principles of religion for granted, That there is a God and a providence, and a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments after this life; and

and never entertained any considerable doubt in their minds to the contrary: but for all this, they never attended to the proper and natural consequences of these principles, nor applied them to their own case; they never seriously considered the notorious inconsistency of their lives with this belief, and what manner of persons they ought to be, who are verily persuaded of the truth of these things.

For no man that is convinced that there is a God, and considers the necessary and immediate consequences of such a persuasion, can think it safe to affront him by a wicked life. No man that believes the infinite happiness and misery of another world, and considers withal that one of these shall certainly be his portion according as he demeans himself in this present life, can think it indifferent what course he takes. Men may thrust away these thoughts, and keep them out of their minds for a long time; but no man that enters into the serious consideration of these matters, can possibly think it a thing indifferent to him, whether he be happy or miserable for ever.

So that a great part of the evils of mens lives would be cured, if they would but once lay them to heart: would they but seriously consider the consequences of a wicked life, they would see so plain reason, and so urgent a necessity for the reforming of it, that they would not venture to continue any longer in it. This course David took here in the text, and he found the happy success of it: *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

In which words there are these two things considerable.

1. The course which David here took for the reforming of his life: *I thought on my ways.*

2. The success of this course. It produced actual and speedy reformation: *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

These are the two heads of my following discourse; which when I have spoken to, I shall endeavour to persuade myself and you to take the same course which David

vid here did; and God grant that I may have the ſame effect.

Firſt, We will conſider the courſe which David here took for the reforming of his life: *I thought on my ways*; or, as the words are rendered in our old tranſlation, *I called my own ways to remembrance*. And this may either ſignify a general ſurvey and examination of his life, reſpecting indifferently the good or bad actions of it; or elſe, which is more probable, it may ſpecially refer to the ſins and miſcarriages of his life: *I thought on my ways*; that is, I called my ſins to remembrance. Neither of theſe ſenſes can be much amiſs, in order to the effect mentioned in the text, the reformation and amendment of our lives: and therefore neither of them can reaſonably be excluded, though I ſhall principally inſiſt upon the latter.

I. This *thinking on our ways* may ſignify a general ſurvey and examination of our lives, reſpecting indifferently our good and bad actions: for *way* is a metaphorical word, denoting the courſe of a man's life and actions. *I thought on my ways*; that is, I examined my life, and called myſelf to a ſtrict account for the actions of it; I compared them with the law of God, the rule and meaſure of my duty, and conſidered how far I had obeyed that law, or offended againſt it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in compariſon of what I might and ought to have done: that by this means I might come to underſtand the true ſtate and condition of my ſoul; and diſcerning how many and great my faults and defects were, I might amend whatever was amiſs, and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it muſt needs be a thing of excellent uſe, for men to ſet apart ſome particular times for the examination of themſelves, that they may know how accounts ſtand between God and them. Pythagoras, or whoever was the author of thoſe golden verſes which paſs under his name, doth eſpecially recommend this practice to his ſcholars, Every night before they ſlept, to call themſelves to account for the actions of the day paſt; inquiring wherein they had tranſgreſſed, what good they had done that day, or omitted to do. And this, no doubt, is an admirable

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means to improve men in virtue, a most effectual way to keep our consciences continually waking and tender, and to make us stand in awe of ourselves, and afraid to sin, when we know beforehand that we must give so severe an account to ourselves of every action.

And certainly it is a great piece of wisdom, to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may in some measure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives; and that we may not be oppressed and confounded by the insupportable weight of the sins of a whole life falling upon us at once; and that perhaps at the very worst time, when we are sick and weak, and have neither understanding nor leisure to recollect ourselves, and to call our sins distinctly to remembrance, much less to exercise any fit and proper acts of repentance for them. For there is nothing to be done in religion, when our reason is once departed from us: then darkness hath overtaken us indeed, and *the night is come, when no man can work.* But though we were never so sensible, and should do all we can at that time; yet, after all this, how it will go with us, God alone knows. I am sure it is too much presumption for any man to be confident, that one general and confused act of repentance will serve his turn for the sins of his whole life. Therefore there is great reason why we should often examine ourselves, both in order to the amendment of our lives, and the ease of our consciences when we come to die.

II. This *thinking of our ways* may particularly and specially refer to the sins and miscarriages of our lives: *I thought on my ways;* that is, I called my sins to remembrance: I took a particular account of the errors of my life, and laid them seriously to heart: I considered all the circumstances and consequences of them, and all other things belonging to them; and reasoning the matter thoroughly with myself, came to a peremptory and fixed resolution of breaking off this wicked course of life, and betaking myself to the obedience of God's laws. And the *consideration of our ways* taken in this sense, which seems to be the more probable meaning of the words, may reasonably imply in it these following particulars.

1. The taking of a particular account of our sins, together

together with the several circumstances and aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and sorrow for them: *I thought on my ways*; that is, I laid them sadly to heart.

3. A serious consideration of the evil and unreasonableness of a sinful course.

4. A due sense of the fearful and fatal consequences of a wicked life.

5. A full conviction of the necessity of quitting this course.

6. An apprehension of the possibility of doing this.

1. The taking of a particular account of our sins, together with the several circumstances and aggravations of them. And to this end we may do well to reflect particularly upon the several stages and periods of our lives, and to recollect at least the principal miscarriages belonging to each of them. And, the better to enable us hereto, it will be useful to have before our eyes some abridgment or summary of the laws of God, containing the chief heads of our duties and sins, of virtues and vices; for this will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, which otherwise perhaps would have been forgotten by us. We should likewise consider the several relations wherein we have stood to others, and how far we have transgressed or failed of our duty in any of these respects.

And having thus far made up our sad account, we may in a great measure understand the number and greatness of our sins; abating for some particulars which are slipt out of our memory, and for sins of ignorance, and daily infirmities, which are innumerable. By all which we may see what vile wretches and grievous offenders we have been; especially if we take into consideration the several heavy circumstances of our sins, which do above measure aggravate them; the heinousness of many of them as to their nature, and the injurious consequences of them to the person, or estate, or reputation of our neighbour; their having been committed against the clear knowledge of our duty; against the frequent checks and convictions of our consciences, telling us, when we did them, that we did amiss; against so many motions and suggestions of God's Holy Spirit, so many admonitions and

and reproofs from others; and contrary to our own moſt ſerious vows and reſolutions, renewed at ſeveral times, eſpecially upon the receiving of the bleſſed ſacrament, and in times of ſickneſs and diſtreſs: and all this notwithſtanding the plaineſt declarations of God's will to the contrary; notwithſtanding the terrors of the Lord, and the wrath of God revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs men; notwithſtanding the cruel ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſins, and the moſt merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood. Add to this, the ſcandal of our wicked lives to our holy religion; the ill example of them to the corrupting and debauching of others; the affront of them to the divine authority; and the horrible ingratitude of them to the mercy, and goodneſs, and patience of God, to which we have ſuch infinite obligations. Thus we ſhould ſet our ſins in order before our eyes, with the ſeveral aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and ſorrow for ſin: *I thought on my ways;* that is, I laid my ſins ſadly to heart. And ſurely whenever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be inwardly touched and ſenſibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but hang down our heads, and ſmite upon our breaſts, and be in pain and heavineſs at our very hearts. I know that the tempers of men are very different, and therefore I do not ſay that tears are abſolutely neceſſary to repentance; but they do very well become it: and a thorough ſenſe of ſin will almoſt melt the moſt hard and obdurate diſpoſition, and fetch water out of a very rock. To be ſure, the conſideration of our ways ſhould cauſe inward trouble, and confuſion in our minds. The leaſt we can do, when we have done amiſs, is to be ſorry for it; to condemn our own folly; and to be full of indignation and diſpleaſure againſt ourſelves for what we have done; and to reſolve never to do the like again. And let us make ſure that our trouble and ſorrow for ſin have this effect, to make us leave our ſins; and then we ſhall need to be the leſs ſolicitous about the degrees and outward expreſſions of it.

3. A ſerious conſideration of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of a ſinful courſe: That ſin is the ſtain and blemiſh

blemiſh of our natures, the reproach of our reaſon and underſtanding, the diſeaſe and the deformity of our ſouls, the great enemy of our peace, the cauſe of all our fears and troubles; that whenever we do a wicked action, we go contrary to the cleareſt dictates of our reaſon and conſcience, to our plain and true intereſt, and to the ſtrongeſt ties and obligations of duty and gratitude. And, which renders it yet more unreaſonable, ſin is a voluntary evil, which men wilfully bring upon themſelves. Other evils may be forced upon us whether we will or no: a man may be poor or ſick by misfortune; but no man is wicked and vitious but by his own choice. How do we betray our folly and weakneſs, by ſuffering ourſelves to be hurried away by every fooliſh luſt and paſſion; to do things which we know to be prejudicial and hurtful to ourſelves, and ſo baſe and unworthy in themſelves, that we are aſhamed to do them, not only in the preſence of a wiſe man, but even of a child or a fool? So that if ſin were followed with no other puniſhment beſides the guilt of having done a ſhameful thing, a man would not by intemperance make himſelf a fool and a beaſt: one would not be falſe and unjuſt, treacherous or unthankful, if for no other reaſon, yet out of mere greatneſs and generoſity of mind, out of reſpect to the dignity of his nature, and out of very reverence to his own reaſon and underſtanding. For let witty men ſay what they will in defence of their vices, there are ſo many natural acknowledgments of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of ſin, that the matter is paſt all denial. Men are generally galled and uneaſy at the thoughts of an evil action, both before and after they have committed it: they are aſhamed to be taken in a crime, and heartily vexed and provoked whenever they are upbraided with it. And it is very obſervable, that though the greater part of the world always was bad, and vice hath ever had more ſervants and followers to cry it up; yet never was there any age ſo degenerate, in which vice could get the better of virtue in point of general eſteem and reputation. Even they whoſe wills have been moſt inſlaved to ſin, could never yet ſo far bribe and corrupt their underſtandings, as to make them give full approbation to it.

4. A due ſenſe of the fearful and fatal conſequences of a wicked life. And theſe are ſo ſad and dreadful, and the danger of them ſo evident, and ſo perpetually threatening us, that no temptation can be ſufficient to excuſe a man to himſelf, and his own reaſon, for venturing upon them. A principal point of wiſdom is, to look to the end of things; not only to conſider the preſent pleaſure and advantage of any thing, but alſo the ill conſequences of it for the future, and to balance them one againſt the other.

Now, ſin in its own nature tends to make men miſerable. It certainly cauſes trouble and diſquiet of mind: and to a conſiderate man, that knows how to value the eaſe and ſatisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater argument againſt ſin, than to conſider, that the forſaking of it is the only way to find reſt to our ſouls.

Beſides this, every vice is naturally attended with ſome particular miſchief and inconvenience; which makes it even in this life a puniſhment to itſelf: and commonly the providence of God, and his juſt judgment upon ſinners, ſtrikes in to heighten the miſchievous conſequences of a ſinful courſe. This we have repreſented in the parable of the prodigal. His riotous courſe of life did naturally, and of itſelf, bring him to want; but the providence of God likewiſe concurred to render his condition more miſerable: *At the ſame time there aroſe a mighty famine in the land;* ſo that he did not only want wherewithal to ſupply himſelf, but was cut off from all hopes of relief from the abundance and ſuperfluity of others. Sin brings many miſeries upon us; and God many times ſends more and greater than ſin brings: and the farther we go on in a ſinful courſe, the more miſeries and the greater difficulties we involve ourſelves in.

But all theſe are but light, and inconſiderable, in compariſon of the dreadful miſeries of another world, to the danger whereof every man that lives a wicked life doth every moment expoſe himſelf: ſo that if we could conquer ſhame, and had ſtupidity enough to bear the infamy and reproach of our vices, and the upbraidings of our conſciences for them, and the temporal miſchiefs and inconveniencies of them; though, for the preſent gratifying

tifying of our luſts, we could brook and diſpenſe with all theſe; yet the conſideration of the end and iſſue of a ſinful courſe, is an invincible objection againſt it, and never to be anſwered. Though the violence of our ſenſual appetites and inclinations ſhould be able to bear down all temporal conſiderations whatſoever; yet methinks the intereſt of our everlaſting happineſs ſhould lie near our hearts; the conſideration of another world ſhould mightily amaze and ſtartle us; the horrors of eternal darkneſs, and the diſmal thoughts of being miſerable for ever, ſhould effectually diſcourage any man from a wicked life. And this danger continually threatens the ſinner; and may, if God be not merciful to him, happen to ſurpriſe him the next moment. And can we make too much haſte to fly from ſo great and apparent a danger? When will we think of ſaving ourſelves, if not when, for ought we know, we are upon the very brink of ruin, and juſt ready to drop into deſtruction?

5. Upon this naturally follows a full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this wicked courſe. And neceſſity is always a powerful and over-ruling argument, and doth rather compel than perſuade; and, after it is once evident, leaves no place for farther deliberation. And the greater the neceſſity is, it is ſtill the more cogent argument. For whatever is neceſſary, is ſo in order to ſome end; and the greater the end, the greater is the neceſſity of the means, without which that end cannot be obtained. Now, the chief and laſt end of all reaſonable creatures, is happineſs; and therefore whatever is neceſſary in order to that, hath the higheſt degree of rational and moral neceſſity. We are not capable of happineſs till we have left our ſins: *For without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

But though men are convinced of this neceſſity, yet this doth not always inforce a preſent change; becauſe men hope they may continue in their ſins, and remedy all at laſt by repentance. But this is ſo great a hazard in all reſpects, that there is no venturing upon it. And, in matters of greateſt concernment, wiſe men will run no hazards, if they can help it. David was ſo ſenſible of this danger, that he would not defer his repentance, and the change of his life, for one moment: *I thought on*

my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies: I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments. This day, this hour, for ought we know, may be the laſt opportunity of making our peace with God. Therefore we ſhould make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate, as Lot did out of Sodom, leſt fire and brimſtone overtake us. He that cannot promiſe himſelf the next moment, hath a great deal of reaſon to ſeize upon the preſent opportunity. While we are lingering in our ſins, if God be not merciful to us, we ſhall be conſumed: therefore *make haſte*, ſinner, and *eſcape for thy life, leſt evil overtake thee.*

6. Laſtly, An apprehenſion of the poſſibility of making this change. God, who deſigned us for happineſs at firſt, and after we had made a forfeiture of it by ſin, was pleaſed to reſtore us again to the capacity of it by the redemption of our bleſſed Lord and Saviour, hath made nothing neceſſary to our happineſs that is impoſſible for us to do, either of ourſelves, or by the aſſiſtance of that grace which he is ready to afford us, if we heartily beg it of him. For that is poſſible to us which we may do by the aſſiſtance of another, if we may have that aſſiſtance for aſking: and God hath promiſed to *give his Holy Spirit to them that aſk him.* So that, notwithſtanding the great corruption and weakneſs of our natures, ſince the grace of God, which brings ſalvation, hath appeared, it is not abſolutely out of our power to leave our ſins, and turn to God. For that may truly be ſaid to be in our power, which God hath promiſed to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourſelves.

So that there is nothing on God's part to hinder this change. He hath ſolemnly declared, that he ſincerely deſires it, and that he is ready to aſſiſt our good reſolutions to this purpoſe. And moſt certainly, when he tells us, that *he hath no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs, and live;* that *he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;* that *he would not that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance,* he means plainly as he ſaith, and doth not ſpeak to us with any private reſerve, or nice diſtinction, between his ſecret and revealed will; that is, he doth not decree one thing, and

and declare the contrary. So far is it from this, that if a sinner entertain serious thoughts of returning to God, and do but once move towards him, how ready is he to receive him! This is in a very lively manner described to us in the parable of the prodigal son, who when he was returning home, and *was yet a great way off*, what haste doth his father make to meet him? *He saw him, and had compassion, and ran.* And if there be no impediment on God's part, why should there be any on ours? One would think all the doubt and difficulty should be on the other side, whether God would be pleased to shew mercy to such great offenders as we have been: but the business doth not stick there. And will we be miserable by our own choice, when the grace of God hath put it into our power to be happy? I have done with the first thing, the course which David here took for the reforming of his life: *I thought on my ways.* I proceed to the

Second, The success of this course. It produced actual and speedy reformation: *I turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And if we consider the matter thoroughly, and have but patience to reason out the case with ourselves, and to bring our thoughts and deliberations to some issue, the conclusion must naturally be the quitting of that evil and dangerous course in which we have lived. For sin and consideration cannot long dwell together. Did but men consider what sin is, they would have so many unanswerable objections against it, such strong fears and jealousies of the miserable issue and event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not say that this change is perfectly made at once. A state of sin and holiness are not like two ways that are just parted by a line, so as a man may step out of the one full into the other; but they are like two ways that lead to two very distant places, and consequently are at a good distance from one another; and the farther any man hath travelled in the one, the farther he is from the other: so that it requires time and pains to pass from the one to the other. It sometimes so happens, that some persons are by a mighty conviction and resolution, and by a very extraordinary and overpowering degree of

God's grace, almoſt perfectly reclaimed from their ſins at once, and all of a ſudden *tranſlated out of the kingdom of darkneſs, into the kingdom of his dear Son.* And thus it was with many of the firſt converts to Chriſtianity; as their prejudices againſt the Chriſtian religion were ſtrong and violent, ſo the Holy Spirit of God was pleaſed to work mightily in them that believed. But, in the uſual and ſettled methods of God's grace, evil habits are maſtered and ſubdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict; and many times, after they are routed, they rally, and make head again; and it is a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any conſiderable degree of ſtrength and maturity, and before a man come to that confirmed ſtate of goodneſs, that he may be ſaid to have conquered and mortified his luſts. But yet this ought not to diſcourage us. For ſo ſoon as we have ſeriouſly begun this change, we are in a good way; and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us: and if we purſue our advantages, we ſhall every day gain ground, and the work will grow eaſier upon our hands; and we who moved at firſt with ſo much ſlowneſs and difficulty, ſhall after a while be enabled to run the ways of God's commandments with pleaſure and delight.

I have done with the two things I propounded to ſpeak to from theſe words; the courſe here preſcribed, and the ſucceſs of it. And now to perſuade men to take this courſe, I ſhall offer two or three arguments.

1. That conſideration is the proper act of reaſonable creatures. This argument God himſelf uſes to bring men to a conſideration of their evil ways, Iſ. xlvi. 8. *Remember, and ſhew yourſelves men: bring it again to mind, O ye tranſgreſſors.* To conſider our ways, and to call our ſins to remembrance, is to ſhew ourſelves men. It is the great fault and infelicity of a great many, that they generally live without thinking, and are acted by their preſent inclinations and appetites, without any conſideration of the future conſequences of things, and without fear of any thing but of a preſent and ſenſible danger; like brute creatures, who fear no evils but what are in view, and juſt ready to fall upon them: whereas to a prudent and conſiderate man, a good or evil in reverſion

sion is capable of as true an estimation, proportionably to the greatness and distance of it, as if it were really present. And what do we think God has given us our reason and understandings for, but to foresee evils at a distance, and to prevent them; to provide for our future security and happiness; to look up *to God our maker, who hath taught us more than the beasts of the earth, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven;* but to consider what we do, and what we ought to do, and what makes most for our future and lasting interest, and what against it? What can a beast do worse, than to act without any consideration and design, than to pursue his present inclination without any apprehension of true danger? The most dull and stupid of all the brute creatures can hardly exercise less reason than this comes to. So that, for a man not to consider his ways, is, to the very best intents and purposes, to be *without understanding, and like the beasts that perish.*

2. This is the end of God's patience and long-suffering towards us, to bring us to consideration. The great design of God's goodness, is to *lead men to repentance. He winks at the sins of men, that they may repent.* He bears long with us, and delays the punishment of our sins, and doth not execute judgment speedily; because he is loth to surprise men into destruction; because he would give them the liberty of second thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, and to consider what they have done, and to reason themselves into repentance. *Consider this, all ye that forget God, lest* his patience turn into fury, and *he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you.*

3. Consideration is that which we must all come to one time or other. Time will come when we shall consider, and cannot help it; when we shall not be able to divert our thoughts from those things which we are now so loth to think upon. Our consciences will take their opportunity to bring our ways to remembrance, when some great calamity or affliction is upon us. Thus it was with the prodigal: when he was brought to the very last extremity, and *was ready to perish with hunger,* then *he came to himself.* When we come to die, then we shall think of our ways with trouble and vexation enough; and

and how glad would we then be, that we had time to consider them? And perhaps, while we are wishing for more time, eternity will swallow us up. To be sure, in the other world, a great part of the misery of wicked men will consist in furious reflexions upon themselves, and the evil actions of their lives. It is said of the rich voluptuous man in the parable, that *in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment;* as if he had never considered and bethought himself till that time. But, alas! it will then be too late to consider; for then consideration will do us no good; it will serve to no other purpose, but to aggravate our misery, and to multiply our stings, and to give new life and rage to those vultures which will perpetually prey upon our hearts. But how much a wiser course would it be, to consider these things in time, in order to our eternal peace and comfort; to think of them while we may redress them, and avoid the dismal consequences of them; than when our case is desperate, and past remedy?

And now what can I say more to perswade every one of us to a consideration of our own ways? We are generally apt to busy ourselves in observing the errors and miscarriages of our neighbours, and are forward to mark and censure the faults and follies of other men; but how few descend into themselves, and turn their eyes inward, and say, *What have I done?* It is an excellent saying of Antoninus the great Emperor and philosopher: "No man "was ever unhappy for not prying into the actions and "conditions of other men; but that man is necessarily "unhappy who doth not observe himself, and consider "the state of his own soul."

This is our proper work; and now is a proper season for it, when we pretend to God and men to set apart a solemn time for the examination of ourselves, and for a serious review of our lives in order to humiliation and repentance, to the reforming and amendment of what is amiss. And though we would venture to dissemble with men, yet let us not dissemble with God also: *For shall not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth the soul, shall not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his ways?*

I know it is a very unpleasant work which I am now putting

putting you upon, and therefore no wonder that men are generally ſo backward to it; becauſe it will of neceſſity give ſome preſent diſturbance to their minds. They whoſe lives have been very vitious, are ſo odious a ſight, ſo horrid a ſpectacle to themſelves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways; of all things in the world they hate conſideration, and are ready to ſay to it as the evil ſpirit did in the goſpel to our Saviour, *What have I to do with thee? art thou come to torment me before the time?* But let not this affright us from it: for whatever trouble it may cauſe at preſent, it is the only way to prevent the anguiſh and the torments of eternity.

The things which I have offered to your conſideration, are of huge moment and importance. They do not concern your bodies and eſtates, but that which is more truly yourſelves, your immortal ſouls, the deareſt and moſt durable part of yourſelves; and they do not concern us for a little while, but for ever. Let me therefore beſpeak your moſt ſerious regard to them in the words of Moſes to the people of Iſrael, after he had ſet the law of God before them, together with the bleſſings promiſed to obedience, and the terrible curſe threatened to the tranſgreſſion of it, Deut. xxxii. 46. 47. *Set your hearts to the words which I teſtify to you this day: for it is not a vain thing; becauſe it is your life.* *Your life*, your eternal life and happineſs depends upon it.

And beſides a tender regard to yourſelves and your own intereſts, which methinks every man, out of a natural deſire of being happy, and dread of being miſerable, ſhould be forward enough to conſider, be pleaſed likewiſe to lay to heart the influence of your example upon others. I ſpeak now to a great many perſons, the eminence of whoſe rank and quality renders their examples ſo powerful, as to be able almoſt to give authority either to virtue or vice. People take their faſhions from you, as to the habits of their minds, as well as their bodies. So that upon you chiefly depends the ruin or reformation of manners, our hopes or deſpair of a better world. What way ſoever you go, you are followed by troops. If you run any ſinful or dangerous courſe, you cannot *periſh alone in your iniquity*; but *thouſands will fall by your ſide, and ten thouſands at your right hand.* And, on the contrary,

contrary, it is very much in your power, and I hope in your wills and deſigns, to be the ſovereign reſtorers of piety and virtue to a degenerate age. It is our part indeed to exhort men to their duty, but it is you that would be the powerful and effectual preachers of righteouſneſs. We may endeavour to make men proſelytes to virtue, but you would infallibly draw diſciples after you; we may try to perſuade, but you could certainly prevail, either to make men good, or to reſtrain them from being ſo bad.

Therefore conſider your ways, for the ſake of others as well as yourſelves. Conſider what you have done, and then conſider what is fit for you to do, and if you do it not, what will be the end of theſe things. And to help you forward in this work, it is not neceſſary that I ſhould rip up the vices of the age, and ſet mens ſins in order before them: it is much better that you yourſelves ſhould call your own ways to remembrance. We have every one a faithful monitor and witneſs in our own breaſts, who, if we will but hearken to him, will deal impartially with us, and privately tell us the errors of our lives. To this monitor I refer you, and to the grace of God, to make theſe admonitions effectual.

Let us then, every one of us, in the fear of God, *ſearch and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.* Let us *take to ourſelves words, and ſay* to God, with thoſe true penitents in ſcripture, *I have ſinned, what ſhall be done unto thee, O thou preſerver of men? Behold, I am vile, what ſhall I anſwer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I will abhor myſelf, and repent in duſt and aſhes.* For *ſurely it is meet to be ſaid unto God, I will not offend any more: that which I know not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. O that there were ſuch an heart in us! O that we were wiſe, and that we underſtood this, that we would conſider our latter end!* And God of his infinite mercy inſpire into every one of our hearts this holy and happy reſolution, for the ſake of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory now and for ever. Amen.

SER-

SERMON XIV.

The folly and danger of irresolution and delaying.

PSAL. cxix. 60.

I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

IN the words immediately going before, you have the course which David took for the reforming of his life, and the success of that course: *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.* A serious reflexion upon the past errors and miscarriages of his life, produced the reformation of it. And you have a considerable circumstance added in these words that I have now read to you, that this reformation was speedy, and without delay: *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* Upon due consideration of his former life, and a full conviction of the necessity of a change, he came to a resolution of a better life, and immediately put this resolution in execution: and to declare how presently and quickly he did it, he expresses it both affirmatively and negatively, after the manner of the Hebrews, who, when they would say a thing with great certainty and emphasis, are wont to express it both ways: *I made haste, and delayed not;* that is, I did with all imaginable speed betake myself to a better course.

And this is the natural effect of consideration. And the true cause why men delay so necessary a work, is, because they stifle their reason, and suffer themselves to be hurried into the embraces of present objects, and do not consider their latter end, and what will be the sad issue and event of a wicked life. For if men would take an impartial view of their lives, and but now and then reflect upon themselves, and lay to heart the miserable and fatal consequences of a sinful course, and think whither it will bring them at last, and that the end of these things will be death and misery: if the carnal and sensual

ſual perſon would but look about him, and conſider how many have been ruined in the way that he is in, how many lie *ſlain and wounded in it; that it is the way to hell, and leads down to the chambers of death;* this would certainly give a check to him, and ſtop him in his courſe.

For it is not to be imagined, but that that man who hath duly conſidered what ſin is, the ſhortneſs of its pleaſures, and the eternity of its puniſhment, ſhould reſolve immediately to break off his ſins, and to live another kind of life. Would any man be intemperate, and walk after the fleſh; would any man be unjuſt, and defraud or oppreſs his neighbour; be profane, and live in the contempt of God and religion, or allow himſelf in any wicked courſe whatſoever, that conſiders and believes a judgment to come, and that becauſe of theſe things the terrible vengeance of God will one day fall upon the children of diſobedience? It is not credible that men who apply themſelves ſeriouſly to the meditation of theſe matters, ſhould venture to continue in ſo imprudent and dangerous a courſe, or could, by any temptation whatſoever, be trained on one ſtep farther in a way that does ſo certainly and viſibly lead to ruin and deſtruction.

So that my work at this time ſhall be, to endeavour to convince men of the monſtrous folly and unreaſonableneſs of delaying the reformation and amendment of their lives; and to perſuade us to reſolve upon it, and, having reſolved, to ſet about it immediately, and without delay; in imitation of the good man here in the text: *I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And, to this end, I ſhall,

1. Conſider the reaſons and excuſes which men pretend for delaying this neceſſary work, and ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

2. I ſhall add ſome farther conſiderations to engage us effectually to ſet about this work ſpeedily, and without delay.

I. We will conſider a little the reaſons and excuſes which men pretend for delaying this neceſſary work; and not only ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them, but that they are each of them a ſtrong reaſon and powerful argument to the contrary.

1. Many pretend that they are abundantly convinced

of

of the great necessity of leaving their sins, and betaking themselves to a better course, and they fully intend to do so; only they cannot at present bring themselves to it, but they hope hereafter to be in a better temper and disposition; and then they resolve, by God's grace, to set about this work in good earnest, and to go through with it.

I know not whether it be fit to call this a reason; I am sure it is the greatest cheat and delusion that any man can put upon himself: for this plainly shews, that thou dost not intend to do this, which thou art convinced is so necessary, but to put it off from day to day. For there is no greater evidence that a man doth not really intend to do a thing, than when notwithstanding he ought upon all accounts, and may in all respects, better do it at present than hereafter, yet he still puts it off. Whatever thou pretendest, this is a mere shift to get rid of a present trouble. It is like giving good words and making fair promises to a clamorous and importunate creditor, and appointing him to come another day, when the man knows in his conscience that he intends not to pay him, and that he shall be less able to discharge the debt then than he is at present. Whatever reasons thou hast against reforming thy life now, will still remain, and be in as full force hereafter, nay probably stronger, than they are at present. Thou art unwilling now; and so thou wilt be hereafter, and in all likelihood much more unwilling. So that this reason will every day improve upon thy hands, and have so much the more strength, by how much the longer thou continuest in thy sins. Thou hast no reason in the world against the present time, but only that it is present; why, when hereafter comes to be present, the reason will be just the same. So that thy present unwillingness is so far from being a just reason against it, that it is a good reason the other way: Because thou art unwilling now, and like to be so, nay more so, hereafter; if thou intendest to do it at all, thou shouldst set about it immediately, and without delay.

2. Another reason which men pretend for the delaying of this work, is the great difficulty and unpleasantness of it. And it cannot be denied, but that there will be some bitterness and uneasiness in it, proportionably to

the growth of evil habits, and the ſtrength of our luſts, and our greater or leſs progreſs and continuance in a ſinful courſe. So that we muſt make account of a ſharp conflict, of ſome pain and trouble, in the making of this change; that it will coſt us ſome pangs and throws before we be born again: for when nature hath been long bent another way, it is not to be expected, that it ſhould be reduced and brought back to its firſt ſtraightneſs without pain and violence.

But then it is to be conſidered, that how difficult and painful ſoever this work be, it is neceſſary; and that ſhould over-rule all other conſiderations whatſoever: that if we will not be at this pains and trouble, we muſt one time or other endure far greater than thoſe which we now ſeek to avoid: that it is not ſo difficult as we imagine; but our fears of it are greater than the trouble will prove: if we were but once reſolved upon the work, and ſeriouſly engaged in it, the greateſt part of the trouble were over. It is like the fear of children to go into the cold water; a faint trial increaſeth their fear and apprehenſion of it; but ſo ſoon as they have plunged into it, the trouble is over; and then they wonder why they were ſo much afraid. The main difficulty and unpleaſantneſs is in our firſt entrance into religion: it preſently grows tolerable, and ſoon after eaſy; and after that, by degrees, ſo pleaſant and delightful, that the man would not for all the world return to his former evil ſtate and condition of life.

We ſhould conſider likewiſe what is the true cauſe of all this trouble and difficulty. It is our long continuance in a ſinful courſe that hath made us ſo loth to leave it: it is the cuſtom of ſinning that renders it ſo troubleſome and uneaſy to men to do otherwiſe: it is the greatneſs of our guilt, heightened and inflamed by many and repeated provocations, that doth ſo gall our conſciences, and fill our ſouls with ſo much terror: it is becauſe we have gone ſo far in an evil way, that our retreat is become ſo difficult, and becauſe we have delayed this work ſo long, that we are now ſo unwilling to go about it; and, conſequently, the longer we delay it, the trouble and difficulty of a change will increaſe daily upon us. And all theſe conſiderations are ſo far from being a good

reaſon

reason for more delays; that they are a strong argument to the contrary. Because the work is difficult now, therefore do not make it more so; and because your delays have increased the difficulty of it, and will do more and more, therefore delay no longer.

3. Another pretended encouragement to these delays, is the great mercy and patience of God. He commonly bears longer with sinners; and therefore there is no such absolute and urgent necessity of a speedy repentance, and reformation of our lives. Men have not the face to give this for a reason; but yet for all that it lies at the bottom of many mens hearts. So Solomon tells us, Eccl. viii. 11. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

But it is not always thus. There are few of us but have seen several instances of God's severity to sinners, and have known several persons surprised by a sudden hand of God, and cut off in the very act of sin, without having the least respite given them, without time or liberty so much as to ask God forgiveness, and to consider either what they had done, or whither they were going. And this may be the case of any sinner; and is so much the more likely to be thy case, because thou dost so boldly presume upon the mercy and patience of God.

But if it were always thus, and thou wert sure to be spared yet a while longer, what can be more unreasonable and disingenuous, than to resolve to be evil because God is good; and because he suffers so long, to sin so much the longer; and because he affords thee a space of repentance, therefore to delay it, and put it off to the last? The proper design of God's goodness, is to lead men to repentance; and he never intended his patience for an encouragement to men to continue in their sins, but for an opportunity and an argument to break them off by repentance.

These are the pretended reasons and encouragements to men to delay their repentance, and the reformation of their lives; and you see how groundless and unreasonable they are: which was the first thing I propounded to speak to.

II. I ſhall add ſome farther conſiderations, to engage men effectually to ſet about this work ſpeedily, and without delay. And becauſe they are many, I ſhall inſiſt upon thoſe which are moſt weighty and conſiderable, without being very curious and ſolicitous about the method and order of them: for, provided they be but effectual to the end of perſuaſion, it matters not how inartificially they are ranged and diſpoſed.

1. Conſider, that in matters of great and neceſſary concernment, and which muſt be done, there is no greater argument of a weak and impotent mind, than irreſolution; to be undetermined where the caſe is ſo plain, and the neceſſity ſo urgent; to be always about doing that which we are convinced muſt be done.

Victuros agimus ſemper, nec vivimus unquam:

"We are always intending to live a new life, but can never find a time to ſet about it." This is as if a man ſhould put off eating, and drinking, and ſleeping, from one day and night to another, till he have ſtarved and deſtroyed himſelf. It ſeldom falls under any man's deliberation, whether he ſhould live or not, if he can chuſe; and if he cannot chuſe, it is in vain to deliberate about it. It is much more abſurd to deliberate, whether we ſhould live virtuouſly or religiouſly, ſoberly or righteouſly in the world; for that upon the matter is to conſult, whether a man ſhould be happy or not. Nature hath determined this for us, and we need not reaſon about it; and, conſequently, we ought not to delay that which we are convinced is ſo neceſſary in order to it.

2. Conſider, that religion is a great and a long work; and aſks ſo much time, that there is none left for the delaying of it. To begin with repentance, which is commonly our firſt entrance into religion; this alone is a great work; and is not only the buſineſs of a ſudden thought and reſolution, but of execution and action: it is the abandoning of a ſinful courſe, which we cannot leave, till we have in ſome degree maſtered our luſts; for ſo long as they are our maſters, like Pharaoh, they will keep us in bondage, and not let us go to ſerve the Lord. The habits of ſin and vice are not to be plucked up and caſt off at once: as they have been long in contracting,

tracting, so, without a miracle, it will require a competent time to subdue them, and get the victory over them; for they are conquered just by the same degrees that the habits of grace and virtue grew up and get strength in us.

So that there are several duties to be done in religion, and often to be repeated: many graces and virtues are to be long practised and exercised, before the contrary vices will be subdued, and before we arrive to a confirmed and settled state of goodness; such a state as can only give us a clear and comfortable evidence of the sincerity of our resolution and repentance, and of our good condition towards God. We have many lusts to mortify; many passions to govern, and bring into order; much good to do, to make what amends and reparation we can for the much evil we have done: we have many things to learn; and many to unlearn, to which we shall be strongly prompted by the corrupt inclinations of our nature, and the remaining power of ill habits and customs: and perhaps we have satisfaction and restitution to make for the many injuries we have done to others, in their persons, or estates, or reputations: in a word, we have a *body of sin* to put off, which clings close to us, and is hard to part with: we have to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God*; to increase and improve our graces and virtues; to *add to our faith, knowledge*, and *temperance*, and *patience*, and *brotherly kindness*, and *charity*; and *to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God*: we have to be useful to the world, and exemplary to others in a holy and virtuous conversation; our *light is so to shine before men, that others may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.*

And do we think all this is to be done in an instant, and requires no time? that we may delay and put off to the last, and yet do all this work well enough? Do we think we can do all this in time of sickness and old age, when we are not fit to do any thing; when the spirit of a man can hardly bear the infirmities of nature, much less a guilty conscience and a wounded spirit? Do we think, that when the day hath been idly spent and squan-

dered away by us, that we ſhall be fit to work when the night and darkneſs comes? When our underſtanding is weak, and our memory frail, and our will crooked, and, by a long cuſtom of ſinning, obſtinately bent the wrong way, what can we then do in religion? what reaſonable or acceptable ſervice can we then perform to God? When our candle is juſt ſinking into the ſocket, how ſhall *our light ſo ſhine before men, that others may ſee our good works?*

Alas! the longeſt life is no more than ſufficient for a man to reform himſelf in, to repent of the errors of his life, and to amend what is amiſs; to put our ſouls into a good poſture and preparation for another world, to train up ourſelves for eternity, and to make ourſelves *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light.*

3. Conſider what a deſperate hazard we run by theſe delays. Every delay of repentance is a venturing the main chance. It is uncertain whether hereafter we ſhall have time for it; and if we have time, whether we ſhall have a heart to it, and the aſſiſtance of God's grace to go through with it. God indeed hath been graciouſly pleaſed to promiſe pardon to repentance: but he hath no where promiſed life and leiſure, the aids of his grace and Holy Spirit, to thoſe who put off their repentance; he hath no where promiſed acceptance to mere ſorrow and trouble for ſin, without *fruits meet for repentance*, and amendment of life; he hath no where promiſed to receive them to mercy and favour, who only give him good words, and are at laſt contented to condeſcend ſo far to him, as to promiſe to leave their ſins when they can keep them no longer. Many have gone thus far in times of affliction and ſickneſs, as to be awakened to a great ſenſe of their ſins, and to be mightily troubled for their wicked lives, and to make ſolemn promiſes and profeſſions of becoming better; and yet, upon their deliverance and recovery, all hath vaniſhed and come to nothing, and their *righteouſneſs hath been as the morning-cloud, and as the early dew, which paſſeth away.* And why ſhould any man, merely upon account of a death-bed repentance, reckon himſelf in a better condition than thoſe perſons, who have done as much, and gone as far as he? And

there

there is no other difference between them but this, that the repentance of the former was tried, and proved insincere, but the death-bed repentance never came to a trial; and yet for all that, God knows whether it was sincere or not, and how it would have proved, if the man had lived longer. Why should any man, for offering up to God the mere refuse and dregs of his life, and the days *which himself hath no pleasure in*, expect to receive the reward of eternal life and happiness at his hands?

But though we do not design to delay this work so long; yet we ought to consider, that all delays in a matter of this consequence are extremely dangerous; because we put off a business of the greatest concernment to the future, and in so doing put it to the hazard whether ever it shall be done.: for the future is as much out of our power to command, as it is to call back the time which is past. Indeed, if we could arrest time, and strike off the nimble wheels of his chariot, and, like Joshua, bid the sun stand still, and make opportunity tarry as long as we had occasion for it; this were something to excuse our delay, or at least to mitigate or abate the folly and unreasonableness of it: but this we cannot do. It is in our power, under the influence of God's grace and Holy Spirit, to amend our lives now; but it is not in our power to live till to-morrow: and who will part with an estate in hand, which he may presently enter upon the possession of, for an uncertain reversion? And yet thus we deal in the great and everlasting concernments of our souls: we trifle away the present opportunities of salvation, and vainly promise to ourselves the future: we let go that which is in our power, and fondly dispose of that which is out of our power, and in the hands of God.

Lay hold then upon the present opportunities, and look upon every action thou dost, and every opportunity of doing any, as possibly thy last; for so it may prove, for any thing thou canst tell to the contrary. If a man's life lay at stake, and he had but one throw for it, with what care and with what concernment would he manage that action? What thou art doing next, may, for ought thou knowest, be for thy life, and for all eternity. So much of thy life is most certainly past; and God knows

thou

thou haſt yet done little or nothing towards the ſecuring of thy future happineſs: it is not certain how much or how little is remaining; therefore be ſure to make the beſt uſe of that little which may be left, and wiſely to manage the laſt ſtake.

4. Seeing the delay of repentance doth mainly rely upon the hopes and encouragement of a future repentance, let us conſider a little how unreaſonable theſe hopes are, and how abſurd the encouragement is which men take from them. To ſin in hopes that hereafter we ſhall repent, is to do a thing in hopes that we ſhall one day be mightily aſhamed of it, that we ſhall one time or other be heartily grieved and troubled that we have done it: it is to do a thing in hopes that we ſhall afterwards condemn ourſelves for it, and wiſh a thouſand times we had never done it; in hopes that we ſhall be full of horror at the thoughts of what we have done, and ſhall treaſure up ſo much guilt in our conſciences as will make us a terror to ourſelves, and be ready to drive us even to deſpair and diſtraction. And is this a reaſonable hope? Is this a fitting encouragement for a wiſe man to give to himſelf, to any action? And yet this is plainly the true meaning of mens going on in their ſins, in hopes that hereafter they ſhall repent of them.

5. If you be ſtill reſolved to delay this buſineſs, and put it off at preſent, conſider well with yourſelves how long you intend to delay it. I hope not to the laſt, nor till ſickneſs come, and death make his approaches to you. This is next to madneſs, to venture all upon ſuch an after game. It is juſt as if a man ſhould be content to be ſhipwrecked, in hope that he ſhall afterwards eſcape by a plank, and get ſafe to ſhore. But I hope none are ſo unreaſonable; yet I fear that many have a mind to put it off to old age, though they do not care to ſay ſo. Seneca expoſtulates excellently with this ſort of men: "Who "ſhall inſure thy life till that time? Who ſhall paſs his "word for thee, that the providence of God will ſuffer "all things to happen and fall out juſt as thou haſt de"ſigned and forecaſt them? Art thou not aſhamed to "reſerve the relicks of thy life for thyſelf, and to ſet apart "only that time to be wiſe and virtuous in, which is "good for nothing? How late is it then to begin to

"live

" live well when thy life is almoſt at an end? What a " ſtupid forgetfulneſs is it of our mortality, to put off " good reſolutions to the fiftieth or ſixtieth year of our " age, and reſolve to begin to do better at that time of " life to which very few perſons have reached?"

But perhaps thou art not altogether ſo unreaſonable, but deſireſt only to reſpite this work till the firſt heat of youth and luſt be over, till the cooler and more conſiderate part of thy life come on; that perhaps thou thinkeſt may be the fitteſt and moſt convenient ſeaſon. But ſtill we reckon upon uncertainties; for perhaps that ſeaſon may never be. However, to be ſure it is much more in our power, by the aſſiſtance of God's grace, which is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours of men, to conquer our luſts now, and to reſiſt the moſt heady and violent temptations to vice, than either to ſecure the future time, or to recover that which is once paſt and gone.

Some ſeem yet more reaſonable, and are content to come lower, and deſire only to put it off for a very little while. But why for a little while? why till to-morrow? To-morrow will be as this day; only with this difference, that thou wilt in all probability be more unwilling and indiſpoſed then.

So that there is no future time which any man can reaſonably pitch upon. All delay in this caſe is dangerous, and as ſenſeleſs as the expectation of the idiot deſcribed by the poet; who, being come to the river-ſide, and intending to paſs over, ſtays till all the water in the river be gone by, and hath left the channel a dry paſſage for him:

——*At ille*
Labitur, & labetur in omne volubilis ævum.

" But the river runs, and runs, and will run; and if he " ſhould ſtay a thouſand years, will never be the nearer " being dry." So that, if the man muſt go over, and there be a neceſſity for it, as there is for repentance, the only wiſe reſolution to be taken in this caſe, is, to wade or ſwim over as well as he can; becauſe the matter will never be amended by tarrying.

6. Laſtly, Conſider what an unſpeakable happineſs it is, to have our minds ſettled in that condition, that we may

may without fear and amazement, nay with comfort and confidence, expect death and judgment. Death is never far from any of us; and the general judgment of the world may be nearer than we are aware of: for *of that day and hour knoweth no man.* And these are two terrible things, and nothing can free us from the terror of them but a good conscience; and a good conscience is only to be had, either by innocence, or by repentance, and amendment of life. Happy man! who by this means is at peace with God, and with himself; and can think of death and judgment without dread and astonishment. For *the sting of death is sin*; and the terror of the great day only concerns those who have lived wickedly and impenitently, and would not be persuaded, neither by the mercies of God, nor by the fear of his judgments, to repent, and turn to him. But if we have truly forsaken our sins, and do sincerely endeavour to live in obedience to the laws and commands of God, the more we think of death and judgment, the greater matter of joy and comfort will these things be to us: for *blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing.* Let us therefore, as soon as possibly we can, put ourselves into this posture and preparation; according to that advice of our blessed Saviour, Luke xii. 35. 36. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.*

And now I hope that enough hath been said to convince men of the great unreasonableness and folly of these delays: nay, I believe, that most men are convinced of it by their own thoughts, and that their consciences call them fools a thousand times for it. But O that I knew what to say that might prevail with men, and effectually persuade them to do that which they are so abundantly convinced is so necessary.

And here I might address myself to the several ages of persons. You that are young, and have hitherto been in a good measure innocent, may prevent the devil, and by an early piety give God the first possession of your souls; and by this means never be put to the trouble of so great and solemn a repentance, having never been deeply engaged in a wicked life. You may do a glorious, I had almost said a meritorious thing, in cleaving stedfastly to

God,

God, and resolving to serve him, when you are so importunately courted and so hotly assaulted by the devil and the world. However, you may not live to be old; therefore, upon that consideration, begin the work presently, and make use of the opportunity that is now in your hands.

You that are grown up to ripeness of years, and are in the full vigour of your age, you are to be put in mind, that the heat and inconsiderateness of youth is now past and gone; that reason and consideration are now in their perfection and strength; that this is the very age of prudence and discretion, of wisdom and wariness: so that now is the proper time for you to be serious, and wisely to secure your future happiness.

As for those that are old, they methinks should need no body to admonish them, that it is now high time for them to begin a new life, and that the time past of their lives is too much to have spent in sin and folly. There is no trifling where men have a great work to do, and but little time to do it in. Your sun is certainly going down, and near its setting; therefore you should quicken your pace, considering that your journey is never the shorter, because you have but little time to perform it in. Alas! man, thou art just ready to die, and hast thou not yet begun to live? Are thy passions and lusts yet unsubdued, and have they had no other mortification than what age hath given them? It is strange to see how, in the very extremities of old age, many men are as if they had still a thousand years to live; and make no preparation for death, though it dogs them at the heels, and is just come up to them, and ready to give them the fatal stroke.

Therefore let us not put off this necessary work of reforming ourselves in what part and age of our lives soever we be: *To day, whilst it is called to day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* Nay, to day is with the latest to begin this work; had we been wise, we would have begun it sooner. It is God's infinite mercy to us that it is not quite too late, that the day of God's patience is not quite expired, and the door shut against us. Therefore do not defer your repentance to the next solemn time, to the next occasion of receiving the

the bleſſed ſacrament: do not ſay, I will then reform, and become a new man; after that I will take leave of my luſts, and ſin no more. For let us make what haſte we can, we cannot poſſibly make too much:

——*Properat vivere nemo ſatis:*

"No man makes haſte enough to be good;" *to ceaſe to do evil, and to learn to do well.* Be as quick as we will, life will be too nimble for us, and go on faſter than our work does; and death will go nigh to prevent us, and ſurpriſe us unawares.

Do, do, ſinner; abuſe and neglect thyſelf yet a little while longer, till the time of regarding thy ſoul, and working out thy own ſalvation, be at an end, and all the opportunities of minding that great concernment be ſlipped out of thy hands, never to be recovered, never to be called back again; no not by thy moſt earneſt wiſhes and deſires, by thy moſt fervent prayers and tears; and thou be brought into the condition of profane Eſau, who, for once deſpiſing the bleſſing, loſt it for ever, and *found no place of repentance, though he ſought it carefully with tears.*

To conclude: Art thou convinced that thy eternal happineſs depends upon following the advice which hath now been given thee? Why then, do but behave thyſelf in this caſe as thou and all prudent men are wont to do in matters which thou canſt not but acknowledge to be of far leſs concernment. If a man be travelling to ſuch a place, ſo ſoon as he finds himſelf out of the way, he preſently ſtops, and makes towards the right way, and hath no inclination to go wrong any farther. If a man be ſick, he will be well preſently, if he can, and not put it off to the future. Moſt men will gladly take the firſt opportunity that preſents itſelf of being rich or great; every man almoſt catches at the very firſt offers of a great place, or a good purchaſe, and ſecures them preſently if he can; leſt the opportunity be gone, and another ſnatch theſe things from him. Do thou thus ſo much more in matters ſo much greater. Return from the error of thy way; be wiſe, ſave thyſelf, as ſoon as poſſibly thou canſt. When happineſs preſents itſelf to thee, do not turn it off, and bid it come again to morrow.

row. Perhaps thou mayeſt never be ſo fairly offered again; perhaps the day of ſalvation may not come again to morrow; nay, perhaps to thee to morrow may never come. But if we were ſure that happineſs would come again, yet why ſhould we put it off? Does any man know how to be ſafe and happy to day, and can he find in his heart to tarry till to morrow?

Now, the God of all mercy and patience give every one of us the wiſdom and grace to *know*, and to *do in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes*, for the ſake of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XV.

The diſtinguiſhing character of a good and a bad man.

1 JOHN iii. 10.

In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the devil: Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.

IT is certainly a matter of the greateſt conſequence to us, both in order to our preſent peace and future happineſs, truly to underſtand our ſpiritual ſtate and condition, and whether we belong to God, and be his children, or not. And it is not ſo difficult as is commonly imagined, to arrive at this knowledge, if we have a mind to it, and will but deal impartially with ourſelves; for the text gives us a plain mark and character whereby we may know it: *In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the devil: Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.*

From which words I ſhall endeavour, by God's aſſiſtance, to lay men open to themſelves, and to repreſent

to every one of us the truth of our condition; and then leave it to the grace of God, and every man's ſerious conſideration, to make the beſt uſe of it.

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this matter, to conſider briefly the occaſion of theſe words. And this will beſt appear by attending ſtedfaſtly to the main ſcope and deſign of this epiſtle. And I think that no man that reads it with attention, can doubt, but that it is particularly deſigned againſt the impious ſect of the Gnoſticks, who, as the fathers tell us, ſprang from Simon Magus, and pretended to extraordinary knowledge and illumination; from whence they had the name of *Gnoſticks*: but, notwithſtanding this glittering pretence, they did allow themſelves in all manner of impious and vitious practices, *turning the grace of God into laſciviouſneſs*, as St. Jude ſpeaks of them. And that St. John aims particularly at this ſort of men, is very evident from the frequent and plain alluſions throughout this epiſtle to thoſe names and titles which this ſect aſſumed to themſelves: as, ep. 1. chap. ii. 4. *He that ſaith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;* and, ℣ 9. *He that ſaith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkneſs even until now.* Which paſſages, and many more in this epiſtle, do plainly refer to the pretences of this ſect, to more than ordinary knowledge and illumination in the myſteries of religion, notwithſtanding they did ſo notoriouſly contradict theſe glorious pretences, by the impiety of their lives, and particularly by their hatred and enmity to their fellow Chriſtians. For, as the ancient fathers tell us, they pretended, that, whatever they did, they could not ſin. And this our Apoſtle intimates in the beginning of this epiſtle: *If we ſay that we have no ſin, we deceive ourſelves, and the truth is not in us.* And they held it lawful to renounce Chriſtianity to avoid perſecution; and not only ſo, but alſo to join with the Heathen in perſecuting the Chriſtians; which ſeems to be the reaſon why the Apoſtle ſo often taxeth them for hatred to their brethren, and calls them murderers.

Now, to ſhew the inconſiſtence of theſe principles and practices with Chriſtianity, the Apoſtle uſeth many arguments; amongſt which he particularly inſiſteth upon

on this, that nothing is more essential to *a disciple of Christ*, and *a child of God*, by which titles Christians were commonly known, than to abstain from the practice of all sin and wickedness: ℣ 6. of this chapter, *Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not: whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him;* whatever knowledge they might pretend to, it was evident they were destitute of the true knowledge of God, and his son Jesus Christ; and, ℣ 7. *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness, is righteous, even as he is righteous;* and, ℣ 8. *He that committeth sin, is of the devil;* and, ℣ 9. *Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin.* Let men pretend what they will, wickedness is a plain mark and character of one that belongs to the devil; as, on the contrary, righteousness is an evidence of a child of God: *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil,* &c.

I shall briefly explain the words, and then consider the matter contained in them.

By *the children of God*, and *the children of the devil*, are meant good and bad men; it being usual in the phrase of scripture, to call persons or things which partake of such a nature or quality, the children of those who are eminently endued with that nature and disposition. Thus they who are of the faith of Abraham, and do the works of Abraham, are called *Abraham's children:* in like manner, those who in their dispositions and actions imitate God, are called *the children of God;* and, on the contrary, those that addict themselves to sin and impiety, are counted of another race and descent; they resemble the devil, and belong to him as the chief and head of that faction.

By *righteousness* is here meant universal goodness, and conformity to the law of God, in opposition to sin, which is the transgression of that law.

By *being manifest* is meant, that hereby good and bad men are really distinguished; so that every one that will examine his condition by this mark, may know of which number he is, and to what party he belongs.

I come now to the main argument contained in the words; which is, to give us a certain character and mark of distinction between a good and bad man: ἐν τούτῳ,

By this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the devil: Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.

In the management of the following diſcourſe, I ſhall proceed in this method.

1. We will conſider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man which is here laid down: *Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.*

2. I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, come to the knowledge of his ſpiritual ſtate and condition: *By this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the devil.*

3. I ſhall inquire whence it comes to paſs, that, notwithſtanding this, ſo many perſons are at ſo great uncertainty concerning their condition.

I. We will conſider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man which is here in the text: *Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God;* which implies likewiſe, on the contrary, that *whoſoever doth righteouſneſs, is of God.* Now, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of this phraſe, he only who lives in all the commandments of God blameleſs, can be ſaid to *do righteouſneſs.* But in this ſenſe *there is none that doth righteouſneſs, no, not one;* and conſequently none could be the children of God: but the text ſuppoſes ſome to be ſo; and therefore, by *doing righteouſneſs* the Apoſtle muſt neceſſarily be underſtood to mean ſomething that is ſhort of perfect and unſinning obedience. So that the queſtion is, What *doing of righteouſneſs* is ſufficient to denominate a man *a child of God,* and to put him into a ſtate of grace and favour with him?

And I do not intend nicely to ſtate this matter. It is not perhaps poſſible to be done; nothing being more difficult, than to determine the very utmoſt bounds and limits of things; and to tell exactly, and juſt to a point, where the line of difference between virtue and vice, between the ſtate of a good and a bad man, is to be placed: and, if it could be done, it would be of no great uſe; for I take it to be no part of my buſineſs, to tell men how many faults they may have, and how little goodneſs, and yet be the children of God; but rather to acquaint them what degrees of holineſs and goodneſs

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are neceſſary to give men a clear and comfortable evidence of their good eſtate towards God; and then to perſuade them, in order to their peace and aſſurance, to endeavour after ſuch degrees.

Wherefore, to ſtate the buſineſs ſo far as is neceſſary to give men a ſufficient knowledge of their condition, I ſhall briefly conſider who they are that, in the Apoſtle's ſenſe, may be ſaid to be *doers of righteouſneſs*, or *not doers of it*. And becauſe the Apoſtle lays down the rule negatively, I ſhall therefore,

In the firſt place, inquire who they are, that, in the Apoſtle's ſenſe, may be ſaid *not to do righteouſneſs*.

1. They that live in the general courſe of a wicked life, in the practice of great and known ſins, as injuſtice, intemperance, filthy and ſenſual luſts, profane neglect and contempt of God and religion; ſo that, by the whole courſe and tenor of their actions, it is plain, beyond all denial, that *there is no fear of God before their eyes*. Concerning theſe the caſe is ſo very evident, that it ſeems too mild and gentle an expreſſion, to call them *not doers of righteouſneſs*.

2. They who live in the habitual practice of any one known ſin, or in the neglect of any conſiderable part of their known duty. For any vitious habit denominates a man, and puts him into an evil ſtate.

3. They who are guilty of the ſingle act of a very heinous and notorious crime, as a deliberate act of blaſphemy, of murder, perjury, fraud, or oppreſſion, or of any other crime of the like enormity. For though ordinarily one ſingle act of ſin doth not denominate one a bad man, when the general courſe of the man's life is contrary; yet the ſingle acts of ſome ſorts of ſins are ſo crying and heinous, and do ſo ſtare every man's conſcience in the face, that they are juſtly eſteemed to be of equal malignity with vitious habits of an inferior kind; becauſe they do almoſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe a great depravation of mind, and a monſtrous alienation from God and goodneſs, in the perſon that deliberately commits them. And they who are guilty in any of theſe three degrees now mentioned, are moſt certainly *not doers of righteouſneſs*; and conſequently it is manifeſt that they are not the children of God.

In the ſecond place, I ſhall inquire who they are that, in the Apoſtle's ſenſe, may be ſaid to *do righteouſneſs*. In ſhort, they who in the general courſe of their lives do keep the commandments of God. And thus the ſcripture generally expreſſeth this matter, by *keeping the commandments of God*, and by *having reſpect to all his commandments*; by *obedience to the goſpel of Chriſt*; by being *holy in all manner of converſation*; by *abſtaining from all kind of evil*; by *cleanſing ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit*; and by *practiſing holineſs in the fear of God*. To which I ſhall add the deſcription which St. Luke gives us of the righteouſneſs of Zacharias and Eliſabeth, Luke i. 6. *They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameleſs*. All which expreſſions do plainly ſignify the actual conformity of our lives and actions, in the general courſe and tenor of them, to the laws and commands of God. And this implies theſe two things; that the tenor of our lives and actions be agreeable to theſe laws of God; and that theſe actions be done with a ſincere and upright mind, out of regard to God and another world, and not for low and temporal ends.

And I chuſe rather to deſcribe a righteous man by the actual conformity of the general courſe of his actions to the law of God, than, as ſome have done, by a ſincere deſire or reſolution of obedience. For a deſire may be ſincere for the time it laſts, and yet vaniſh before it comes to any real effect. And, how innocently ſoever it was intended, it is certainly a great miſtake in divinity, and of very dangerous conſequence to the ſouls of men, to affirm, that a deſire of grace is grace; and, conſequently, by the ſame reaſon, that a deſire of obedience is obedience. A ſincere deſire and reſolution to be good, is indeed a good beginning, and ought by all means to be cheriſhed and encouraged; but yet it is far enough from being the thing deſired, or from being accepted for it in the eſteem of God: for God never accepts the deſire for the deed, but where there is no poſſibility, no opportunity of doing the thing deſired; but if there be, and the thing be not done, there is no reaſon to imagine that the deſire in that caſe ſhould be accepted, as if the thing were done. For inſtance: If

a man give alms according to his ability, and would give more if he were able; in this case, the desire is accepted for the deed. And of this case it is, and no other, that the Apostle speaks, 2 Cor. viii. 12. *If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not;* that is, God interprets and accepts the charity of men, according to the largeness of their hearts, and not according to the straitness of their fortunes. But it is a great mistake, to draw a general conclusion from this text, that in all cases God accepts the will for the deed. For though a man sincerely desire and resolve to reform his life, as I doubt not many men often do, but do it not when there is time and opportunity for it, these desires and resolutions are of no account with God; all this *righteousness is but as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which passeth away.* Men are not apt to mistake so grosly in other matters. No man believes hunger to be meat, or thirst to be drink; and yet there is no doubt of the truth and sincerity of these natural desires. No man thinks that covetousness, or a greedy desire to be rich, is an estate; or that ambition, or an insatiable desire of honour, is really advancement: just so, and no otherwise, a desire to be good is righteousness. The Apostle's caution, a little before the text, may fitly be applied to this purpose: *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.* Not but that the best of men do sometimes fall through infirmity, and are betrayed by surprise, and borne down by the violence of temptation. But, if the general course of our actions be a *doing of righteousness*, the grace of the gospel, in and through the merits of our blessed Saviour, doth accept of this imperfect, but sincere obedience.

II. I shall endeavour to shew, That, by this mark, every man may with due care and diligence arrive at the certain knowledge of his spiritual state and condition: *By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.* By which the Apostle means, that this is a real mark of difference betwixt good and bad men, and that

that whereby they very often manifeſt themſelves to others; eſpecially when the courſe of their lives is eminently pious and virtuous, or notoriouſly impious and wicked. But, becauſe it doth not ſo much concern us curiouſly to inquire into, much leſs ſeverely to cenſure the ſtate of other men, I ſhall only conſider at preſent how far, by this mark and character, every man may make a certain judgment of his own good or bad condition.

1. By this character, as I have explained it, he that is a bad man may certainly know himſelf to be ſo, if he will but conſider his condition, and do not wilfully deceive and delude himſelf. As for thoſe who are vitious in the general courſe of their lives, or have been guilty of the act of ſome heinous or notorious ſin not yet repented of, their caſe is ſo plain for the moſt part, even to themſelves, that they can have no manner of doubt concerning it. Such men ſtand continually convicted and condemned by the ſentence of their own minds: and whenever they reflect upon themſelves, which they do as ſeldom as they can, they are a *terror to themſelves*, and full of amazement, and fearful expectation of judgment. Not but that even, in ſo plain a caſe, many men do uſe great endeavours to cheat themſelves, and would be very glad to find out ways to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of heaven, and to gain the favour, at leaſt the forgiveneſs of God, without repentance, and amendment of their lives. And to this end, they are willing to confeſs their ſins, and to undergo any penance that ſhall be impoſed upon them, that only excepted which only can do them good; I mean, real reformation: and, when the prieſt hath abſolved them, they would fain believe that God hath forgiven them too. However, they return to their former courſe; and, being ſtrongly addicted to their luſts, between ſtupidity and fooliſh hopes, they at laſt come to this deſperate reſolution, to venture all upon the abſolution of the prieſt, *& valeat quantum valere poteſt*, "let it have what effect it can;" though I dare ſay, that, in their moſt ſerious thoughts, they are horribly afraid it will do them no good.

And for thoſe who are ſinners of a leſſer rate, and perhaps

perhaps allow themſelves only in one kind of vice, they likewiſe have reaſon to conclude themſelves in a bad condition; eſpecially if they conſider, that he who lives in the breach of any one commandment of God, is guilty of all; becauſe he contemns that authority which enacted the whole law. And it is eaſy for any man to diſcern the habit of any ſin in himſelf; as, when he frequently commits it, when he takes up no firm reſolutions againſt it, when he uſeth no competent care to avoid the temptations to it, nor puts forth any vigorous endeavours to break off from it, or, however, ſtill continues in the practice of it: for the cuſtomary practice of any known ſin, is utterly inconſiſtent with ſincere reſolutions and endeavours againſt it, there being no greater evidence of the inſincerity of reſolutions and endeavours in any kind, than ſtill to go on to do contrary to them.

2. By this character likewiſe, they that are ſincerely good may generally be well aſſured of their good condition, and that they are *the children of God*. And there are but two things neceſſary to evidence this to them; that the general courſe and tenor of their actions be agreeable to the laws of God, and that they be ſincere and upright in thoſe actions. And both theſe every man may ſufficiently know concerning himſelf: for, if the laws of God be plain, and lie open to every man's underſtanding, then it is as eaſy for every man to know when he obeys God and keeps his commandments, as when he obeys the commands of his father or his prince, and when he keeps the known laws of the land. And no ſenſible and conſiderate man ever had any doubt of this kind: for if a man can know anything, he can certainly tell when he keeps or breaks a known law; ſo that all doubts of this nature are frivolous and idle pretences to cover mens faults, and ſuch as they would be aſhamed to alledge in any other caſe.

And a good man may likewiſe know when he obeys God ſincerely. Not but that men often deceive themſelves with an opinion, or at leaſt a groundleſs hope of their own ſincerity; but if they will deal fairly with themſelves, and uſe due care and diligence, there are very few caſes, if any, wherein they may not know their own ſincerity in any act of obedience to God. For what,

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can a man know concerning himſelf, if not the reality of his own intentions? If any man ſhould in earneſt tell me, that he doubted very much whether he had that friendſhip for me which he made profeſſion of, and that he was afraid that his affection to me was not real and ſincere; I confeſs I ſhould doubt of it too: becauſe I ſhould certainly conclude, that no man could know that matter ſo well as he himſelf.

And there is no doubt, but whoever hath a hearty kindneſs for another, and a ſincere deſire to ſerve and pleaſe him, knows he has it. And accordingly good and holy men in ſcripture do every where, with great confidence and aſſurance, appeal to God concerning the integrity and ſincerity of their hearts towards him. Job and David, Hezekiah and Nehemiah, in the Old Teſtament; and in the New, St. Paul for himſelf and Timothy, make this ſolemn profeſſion of their ſincerity, 2 Cor. i. 12. *Our rejoicing is this, the teſtimony of our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity we have our converſation in the world.* And I cannot call to mind ſo much as any one paſſage in ſcripture, from whence it can be collected, that any good man ever doubted of his own ſincerity. And to ſay the truth, it would not be modeſty, but impudence in any man, to declare that he ſuſpects himſelf of hypocriſy; good men have always abhorred the thoughts of it. *Ye have heard of the patience of Job*, and yet he could not bear to have his integrity queſtioned. It was a brave and generous ſpeech of his, *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me.*

And yet it hath ſo happened, that this is become a very common doubt among religious people; and they have been ſo unreaſonably cheriſhed in it, as to have it made a conſiderable evidence of a man's ſincerity, to doubt of it himſelf. It is indeed ſaid in ſcripture, Jer. xvii. 9. that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked, who can know it?* which is true concerning our future intentions and actions; no man knowing how his mind may change hereafter. Little did Hazael think that ever he ſhould do thoſe things which the Prophet foretold him. But though this be true in itſelf, yet it is not the meaning of that text. For the Prophet, in that chapter, plainly makes uſe of this conſideration, of the falſhood

falſhood and deceitfulneſs of man's heart, as an argument to take off the people of Iſrael from *truſting in the arm of fleſh*, and in thoſe promiſes which were made to them of foreign aſſiſtance from Egypt: becauſe men may pretend fair, and yet deceive thoſe that rely upon them; for *the heart of man is deceitful, and deſperately wicked*; and none but God knows whether mens inward intentions be anſwerable to their outward profeſſions; *for he ſearcheth the heart, and trieth the reins.* And this I verily believe is all that the Prophet here intends, that there is a great deal of fraud and deceit in the hearts of bad men, ſo that no man can rely upon their promiſes and profeſſions, but God knows the hearts of all men. But now, becauſe God alone knows the hearts of all men, and the ſincerity of their intentions towards one another, doth it from hence follow, that it is a thing either impoſſible or very difficult for any man to know the ſincerity of his own preſent intentions and actions? To make any ſuch concluſion, were to *condemn the generation of God's children*, thoſe holy and excellent men in ſcripture, Job, and David, and Hezekiah, and St. Paul, who do ſo frequently appeal to God concerning their own integrity. And ſurely when the Apoſtle ſaith, *No man knows the things of a man, but the ſpirit of a man which is in him*, he plainly ſuppoſes, that every man is conſcious to the motions and intentions of his own mind. I have inſiſted the longer upon this, that I might, from the very foundation, deſtroy an imagination, which is not only untrue in itſelf, but has likewiſe been a very great hinderance to the peace and comfort of many good men.

III. Let us inquire whence it comes to paſs, that, notwithſtanding this, ſo many perſons are at ſo great uncertainty about their ſpiritual condition. For the clearing of this matter, we will diſtinctly conſider theſe three things. 1. The grounds of the falſe hopes and confidence of men really bad, concerning their good condition. 2. The cauſeleſs doubts and jealouſies of men really good, concerning their bad condition. And, 3. The juſt cauſes of doubting in others. As for the troubles and fears of men who are notoriouſly bad, and live in the practice of known vices, theſe do not fall under our conſideration. If they be troubled about their condition,

dition, it is no more than what they ought to be; and if they be only doubtful of it, it is leſs than they ought to be. To perſons in this condition, there is only counſel to be given to leave their ſins, and become better; but no comfort to be adminiſtered to them till firſt they have followed that counſel: for, till they reform, if they think themſelves to be in a bad condition, they think juſt as they ought, and as there is great reaſon; and no body ſhould go about to perſuade them otherwiſe.

1. Firſt then, we will conſider the grounds of the falſe hopes and confidence of men really bad, concerning their good condition. I do not now mean the worſt of men, but ſuch as make ſome ſhew and appearance of goodneſs. It is very unpleaſing to men to fall under the hard opinion and cenſure of others; but the moſt grievous thing in the world, for a man to be condemned by himſelf; and therefore it is no wonder that men uſe all manner of ſhifts to avoid ſo great an inconvenience, as is the ill opinion of a man's ſelf concerning himſelf and his own condition.

Some therefore rely upon the profeſſion of the Chriſtian faith, and their being baptized into it. But this is ſo far from being any exemption from a good life, that it is the greateſt and moſt ſolemn obligation to it. Doſt thou believe the doctrine of the goſpel? thou of all men art inexcuſable, if thou alloweſt thyſelf in ungodlineſs and worldly luſts. Others truſt to their external devotion; they frequent the church, and ſerve God conſtantly; they pray to him, and hear his word, and receive the bleſſed ſacrament: but let us not deceive ourſelves, God is not mocked. All this is ſo far from making amends for the impiety of our lives, that, on the contrary, the impiety of our lives ſpoils all the acceptance of our devotions: *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law*, (that is, from obeying it), *even his prayer ſhall be an abomination.*

Others, who are ſenſible they are very bad, depend very much upon their repentance, eſpecially if they ſet ſolemn times apart for it. And there is no doubt, but that a ſincere repentance will put a man into a good condition: but then it is to be conſidered, that no repentance is ſincere, but that which produceth a real change and

and reformation in our lives. For we have not repented to purpose, if we return again to our sins. It is well thou art in some measure sensible of thy miscarriage; but thou art never safe, till thou hast forsaken thy sins; thy estate and condition towards God is not changed, till thou hast really altered thyself, and the course of thy life.

Others satisfy themselves with the exercise of some particular graces and virtues; justice, and liberality, and charity. And is it not a thousand pities that thy life is not all of a piece, and that all the other parts of it are not answerable to these; that thou shouldst lose the reward of so much real goodness, out of thy fondness to any one vice or lust; that when *thou art not far from the kingdom of God*, for lack of one or two things more thou shouldst fall short of it? Hast thou never heard what the scripture saith, that *he who offends in one point, is a transgressor of the whole law?* To make a man a good man, all parts of goodness must concur; but any one way of wickedness, is sufficient to denominate a man bad.

Lastly, Some who are very careful of their outward carriage and conversation, but yet are conscious to themselves of great secret faults and vices, when they can find no comfort from themselves, and the testimony of their own consciences, are apt to comfort themselves in the good opinion which perhaps others have of them. But if we know ourselves to be bad, and *our own hearts to condemn us*, it is not the good opinion of others concerning us which can either alter or better our condition. They may have reason for their charity, and yet thou none for thy confidence. Trust no body concerning thyself rather than thyself; because no body can know thee so well as thou mayest know thyself.

These, and such as these, are the hopes of the hypocrite, which Job elegantly compares to the spider's web, finely and artificially wrought, but miserably thin and weak; so that we ourselves may see through them; and, if we lay the least stress upon them, they will break. They are but pleasant dreams and delusions, which, whenever we are awakened to a serious consideration of our condition, by the apprehensions of approaching death and judgment, will presently vanish and disappear. So the

ſame holy man tells us, Job xxvii. 8. *What is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his ſoul?*

2. We will conſider, in the next place, the cauſeleſs doubts and jealouſies of men really good, concerning their bad condition. For as ſome are prone, beyond all reaſon, to delude themſelves with vain hopes of their good condition; ſo others are apt as unreaſonably to torment themſelves with groundleſs fears and jealouſies that their eſtate is bad. And of theſe doubts there are ſeveral occaſions, the chief whereof I ſhall mention, by which we may judge of the reſt that are of the like nature.

1*ſt*, Some are afraid that they are reprobated from all eternity, and therefore they cannot be the *children of God*. This is ſo unreaſonable, that, if it were not a real cauſe of trouble to ſome perſons, it did not deſerve to be conſidered. For no man that ſincerely endeavours to pleaſe God, and to keep his commandments, hath from ſcripture the leaſt ground to ſuſpect any latent or ſecret decree of God againſt him that ſhall work his ruin. But whatever the decrees of God be concerning the eternal ſtate of men, ſince they are ſecret to us, they can certainly be no rule either of our duty or comfort. And no man hath reaſon to think himſelf rejected of God, either from eternity or in time, that does not find the marks of reprobation in himſelf; I mean an evil heart and life. By this indeed a man may know, that he is out of God's favour for the preſent; but he hath no reaſon at all from hence to conclude, that God hath from all eternity and for ever caſt him off. That God calls him to repentance, and affords to him the ſpace and means of it, is a much plainer ſign that God is willing and ready to have mercy on him, than any thing elſe is, or can be, that God hath utterly caſt him off. And therefore, for men to judge of their condition by the decrees of God, which are hid from us, and not by his word, which is *near us, and in our hearts*, is as if a man, wandering in the wide ſea in a dark night, when the heaven is all clouded about, ſhould yet reſolve to ſteer his courſe by the ſtars, which he cannot ſee, but only gueſs at, and neglect the compaſs, which is at hand, and would afford him a much better and more certain direction.

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This therefore is to be rejected as a fond and groundleſs imagination, and which ought to trouble no body; becauſe no body doth nor can know any thing concerning it. Moſes hath long ſince very well determined this matter, Deut. xxix. 29. *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but thoſe things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

2*dly*, Good men are conſcious to themſelves of many frailties and imperfections, and therefore they are afraid of their condition. But God conſiders the infirmities of our preſent ſtate, and expects no other obedience from us, in order to our acceptance with him, but what this ſtate of imperfection is capable of: and provided the ſincere endeavour and general courſe of our lives be to pleaſe him and keep his commandments, the terms of the goſpel are ſo merciful, that our frailties ſhall not be imputed to us, ſo as to affect our main ſtate, and to make us ceaſe to be the children of God. And though we may be guilty of many errors and ſecret ſins which eſcape our notice and obſervation, yet it is not impoſſible for us to exerciſe ſuch a repentance for theſe as will be available for their pardon. For we have to deal with a merciful God, who is pleaſed to accept of ſuch an obedience and of ſuch a repentance as we are capable of performing. Now, there is a great difference between thoſe ſins which require a particular repentance before we can hope for the pardon of them, (as all great, and deliberate, and preſumptuous ſins do, which are never committed without our knowledge; and are ſo far from ſlipping out of our memory, that they are continually flying in our faces, and we cannot forget them if we would), and ſins of infirmity, occaſioned by ſurpriſe, and violence of temptation, through ignorance or inadvertency; for a general repentance, ſuch as we every day exerciſe in our devotions and prayers to God, may ſuffice for theſe. I ſpeak not this to hinder any from a more particular repentance of all their known failings, the more particular the better; but to remove the groundleſs fears and jealouſies of men about their main eſtate and condition. And if any aſk, how I know that a general repentance will ſuffice for theſe kind of ſins? I anſwer, Becauſe more than this in

many caſes is impoſſible; ſo that either we muſt reſt ſatisfied that God will forgive them upon theſe terms, or conclude that they ſhall not be forgiven at all; which is contrary to the whole tenor of the ſcriptures. I ſay, in many caſes, more than this is impoſſible; becauſe ſins of ignorance, and thoſe common errors and frailties of human life, which David calls *ſecret ſins*, are not particularly known to us when they are committed; and conſequently it is impoſſible that we ſhould particularly repent of them. And therefore, in this caſe, there can be no doubt, but that God doth accept of a general repentance, as he did from David, when he made that humble confeſſion and prayer to him, Pſal. xix. 12. *Who can underſtand his errors? cleanſe thou me from ſecret ſins.*

3*dly*, They are afraid their obedience is not ſincere, becauſe it proceeds many times from fear, and not always out of pure love to God. For anſwer to this: It is plain from ſcripture that God propounds to men ſeveral motives and arguments to obedience; ſome proper to work upon their fear, as the threatenings of puniſhment; ſome upon their hope, as the promiſes of bleſſing and reward; others upon their love, as the mercies and forgiveneſs of God. From whence it is evident he intended they ſhould all work upon us. And accordingly the ſcripture gives us inſtances in each kind. *Noah, moved with fear*, obeyed God in *preparing an ark. Moſes had reſpect unto the recompence of reward. Mary Magdalen loved much.* And as it is hard to ſay, ſo it is not neceſſary to determine, juſt how much influence, and no more, each of theſe hath upon us. It is very well, if men be reclaimed from their ſins, and made good, by the joint force of all the conſiderations which God offers to us. To be ſure, love is the nobleſt and moſt generous principle of obedience; but fear commonly takes the firſt and faſteſt hold of us, and, in times of violent temptation, is perhaps the beſt argument to keep, even the beſt of men, within the bounds of their duty.

4*thly*, Another cauſe of doubting in good men, is from a ſenſe of their imperfect performance of the duties of religion, and of the abatement of their affections towards God at ſome times. They have many wandering thoughts in prayer, and other exerciſes of devotion; and they

they cannot for their life keep their minds continually intent on what they are about. This we ſhould ſtrive againſt as much as we can; and that is the utmoſt we can do: but to cure this wholly, is impoſſible. The infirmity of our nature and the frame of our minds will not admit of it. And therefore no man ought to queſtion his ſincerity, becauſe he cannot do that which is impoſſible for men to do.

And then for the abatement of our affections to God and religion at ſome times, this naturally proceeds from the inconſtancy of mens tempers; by reaſon of which it is not poſſible that the beſt of men ſhould be able always to maintain and keep up the ſame degree of zeal and fervour towards God. But our comfort is, that God doth not meaſure mens ſincerity by the tides of their affections, but by the conſtant bent of their reſolutions, and the general tenor of their life and actions.

5*thly*, Another cauſe of theſe doubts is, that men expect more than ordinary and reaſonable aſſurance of their good condition; ſome particular revelation from God, an extraordinary impreſſion upon their minds to that purpoſe, which they think the ſcripture means by the *teſtimony*, and *ſeal*, and *earneſt of the Spirit*. God may give this when, and to whom he pleaſes; but I do not find he hath any where promiſed it. And all that the ſcripture means by thoſe phraſes, of the *teſtimony*, and *ſeal*, and *earneſt of the Spirit*, is, to my apprehenſion, no more but this, that the Holy Spirit which God beſtowed upon Chriſtians in ſo powerful and ſenſible a manner, was a ſeal and earneſt of their reſurrection to eternal life; according to that plain text, Rom. viii. 11. *If the Spirit of him that raiſed up Jeſus from the dead, dwell in you; he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead, ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* But then, who they are that have the Spirit of God, is only to be known by the real fruits and effects of it. If we be *led by the Spirit*, and *walk in the Spirit*, and *do not fulfil the luſts of the fleſh*, then *the Spirit of God dwelleth in us*. But this is very far from an immediate and extraordinary revelation from the Spirit of God to the minds of good men, telling them in particular that they are the children of God. I know not what peculiar fa-

vour God may ſhew to ſome; but I know no ſuch thing, nor ever yet met with any wiſe and good man that did affirm it of himſelf: and I fear that in moſt of thoſe who pretend to it, it is either mere fancy, or groſs deluſion.

6thly, As for the caſe of melancholy, it is not a reaſonable caſe; and therefore doth not fall under any certain rules and directions. They who are under the power of it, are ſeldom fit to take that counſel which alone is fit to be given them; and that is, not to believe themſelves concerning themſelves, but to truſt the judgment of others, rather than their own apprehenſions. In other caſes, every man knows himſelf beſt; but a melancholy man is moſt in the dark as to himſelf. This cauſe of trouble and doubting is very much to be pitied, but hard to be removed, unleſs by phyſick, or by time, or by chance. One may happen to ſay ſomething that may hit the humour of a melancholy man, and ſatisfy him for the preſent; but reaſon muſt needs ſignify very little to thoſe perſons, the nature of whoſe diſtemper it is, to turn every thing that can be ſaid for their comfort, into objections againſt themſelves.

3. But, beſides thoſe who miſtake their condition, either by preſuming it to be better, or fearing it to be worſe than it is, there are likewiſe others, who, upon good grounds, are doubtful of their condition, and have reaſon to be afraid of it; thoſe I mean, who have ſome beginnings of goodneſs, which yet are very imperfect. They have good reſolutions, and do many things well; but they often fall, and are frequently pulled back by thoſe evil inclinations and habits which are yet in a great meaſure unſubdued in them. Theſe I cannot liken better than to the borderers between two countries, who live in the marches and confines of two powerful kingdoms, both which have a great influence upon them, ſo that it is hard to ſay whoſe ſubjects they are, and to which prince they belong. Thus it is with many in religion: they have pious inclinations, and have made ſome fair attempts towards goodneſs; they have begun to refrain from ſin, and to reſiſt the occaſions and temptations to it; but ever and anon they are maſtered by their old luſts, and carried off from their beſt reſolutions; and perhaps, upon a little conſideration, they repent,

and

and recover themſelves again; and, after a while, are again intangled and overcome.

Now, the caſe of theſe perſons is really doubtful, both to themſelves and others. And the proper direction to be given them, in order to their peace and ſettlement, is by all means to encourage them to go on and fortify their good reſolutions; to be more vigilant and watchful over themſelves; to ſtrive againſt ſin, and to reſiſt it with all their might. And, according to the ſucceſs of their endeavours in this conflict, the evidence of their good condition will every day clear up, and become more manifeſt. The more we grow in grace, and the ſeldomer we fall into ſin, and the more even and conſtant our obedience to God is, ſo much the greater and fuller ſatisfaction we ſhall have of our good eſtate towards God: for *the path of the juſt, is as the ſhining light, which ſhines more and more unto the perfect day;* and *the work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.*

I ſhall only make two or three inferences from what hath been diſcourſed upon this argument, and ſo conclude.

1. From hence we learn the great danger of ſins of omiſſion as well as commiſſion: *Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.* The mere neglect of any of the great duties of religion, of piety towards God, and of kindneſs and charity to men, though we be free from the commiſſion of great ſins, is enough to caſt us out of the favour of God, and to ſhut us for ever out of his kingdom: *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirſty, and ye gave me no drink; ſick, and in priſon, and ye viſited me not: therefore depart, ye curſed.*

2. It is evident from what hath been ſaid, that nothing can be vainer than for men to live in any courſe of ſin and impiety, and yet to pretend to be the children of God, and to hope for eternal life. The children of God will do the works of God; and whoever hopes to enjoy him hereafter, will endeavour to be like him here: *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifies himſelf, even as he is pure.*

3. You ſee what is the great mark and character of a man's good or bad condition: *Whoſoever doth righteouſneſs,*

ouſneſs, is of God: and whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God. Here is a plain and ſenſible evidence, by which every man, that will deal honeſtly with himſelf, may certainly know his own condition; and then, according as he finds it to be, may take comfort in it, or make haſte out of it. And we need not aſcend into heaven, nor go down into the deep, to ſearch out the ſecret counſels and decrees of God: there needs no anxious inquiry whether we be of the number of God's elect. If we daily mortify our luſts, and grow in goodneſs, and take care to add to our faith and knowledge, temperance, and patience, and charity, and all other Chriſtian graces and virtues, we certainly take the beſt courſe in the world to *make our calling and election ſure.* And without this it is impoſſible that we ſhould have any comfortable and well-grounded aſſurance of our good condition. This one mark of *doing righteouſneſs* is that into which all other ſigns and characters which are in ſcripture given of a good man, are finally reſolved. And this anſwers all thoſe various phraſes which ſome men would make to be ſo many ſeveral and diſtinct marks of a *child of God:* as, whether we have the true knowledge of God, and divine illumination; for *hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments:* whether we ſincerely love God; for *this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments:* and whether God loves us; for *the righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, and his countenance will behold the upright:* whether we be regenerate, and born of God; for *whoſoever is born of God, ſinneth not:* whether we have *the Spirit of God witneſſing with our ſpirits, that we are the children of God;* for *as many as have the Spirit of God, are led by the Spirit,* and *by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the fleſh:* whether we belong to Chriſt, and have an intereſt in him or not; for *they that are Chriſt's, have crucified the fleſh, with the affections and luſts thereof:* in a word, whether the promiſe of heaven and eternal life belong to us; for *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord;* but if we *have our fruits unto holineſs, the end* will be *everlaſting life.* So that you ſee at laſt, the ſcripture brings all to this one mark, holineſs, and obedience to the laws of God, or a vitious and wicked life: *In this the children of God are manifeſt,*

manifeſt, and the children of the devil: Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.

Let us then deal impartially with ourſelves, and bring our lives and actions to this trial, and never be at reſt till the matter be brought to ſome iſſue, and we have made a deliberate judgment of our condition, whether we be the *children of God* or not: and if, upon a full and fair examination, our conſciences give us this teſtimony, that by the grace of God we have *denied ungodlineſs and worldly luſts*, and have lived *ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world*, we may take joy and comfort in it; for *if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* But if, upon the ſearch and trial of our ways, our caſe appear clearly to be otherwiſe, or if we have juſt cauſe to doubt of it, let us not venture to continue one moment longer in ſo uncertain and dangerous a condition. And if we deſire to know the way of peace, the ſcripture hath ſet it plainly before us: *Waſh ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well. Come now and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord: though your ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be white as ſnow. Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* Though our caſe be very bad, yet it is not deſperate: *This is a faithful ſaying, and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Jeſus Chriſt came into the world to ſave ſinners.* And he is ſtill willing to ſave us, if we be but willing to leave our ſins, and to ſerve him in holineſs and righteouſneſs the remaining part of our lives. We may yet be *turned from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* We who have ventured ſo long upon the brink of ruin, may yet, by the infinite mercies of God, and by the power of his grace, be reſcued from the baſe and miſerable ſlavery of the devil and our luſts, *into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God.*

And thus I have endeavoured, with all the plainneſs I could, to repreſent every man to himſelf, and to let him clearly ſee what his condition is towards God, and how the caſe of his ſoul and of his eternal happineſs ſtands. And I do verily believe, that what I have ſaid in this matter

matter is the truth of God, to which we ought all gladly to yield and render up ourſelves: for *great is truth, and mighty above all things.* She is faithful and impartial in her counſels; and though ſhe be not always welcome, yet it is always wiſe to hearken to her; for in great kindneſs and charity ſhe lets men know their condition, and the danger of it, that they may take care to prevent it: *With her is no accepting of perſons, and in her judgment there is no unrighteouſneſs.* I will conclude all with that excellent advice of a Heathen philoſopher: "Make it no "longer a matter of diſpute what are the marks and "ſigns of a good man, but immediately ſet about it, "and endeavour to become ſuch an one," *Antonin. lib.* 10.

SERMON XVI.

Of the joy which is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner.

LUKE XV. 7.

I ſay unto you, that likewiſe joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons, which need no repentance.

AFter many attempts made in vain to reclaim ſinners from their evil ways, and to bring them to the wiſdom of the juſt, it is hard for us, who are the meſſengers of God to men, not to ſit down in deſpondence, and at laſt quite to deſpair of doing good upon them. But when I conſider the infinite patience of God with ſinners, and how long *his Spirit ſtrives with them,* why ſhould we, we who are ſinners ourſelves, think much to bear with ſinners, and patiently to contend with their obſtinacy and perverſeneſs? When I conſider that our bleſſed Saviour, the great preacher and pattern of righteouſneſs, did not give over the worſt of men, nor deſpair of their recovery; this methinks ſhould make us, who

who are *ambaſſadors for Chriſt*, unwearied in *beſeeching men in his ſtead to be reconciled to God.*

And of this we have a famous inſtance in this chapter. The publicans and ſinners, as they had done ſeveral times before, came to hear our Saviour: he treated them very kindly, and converſed familiarly with them; at this the Phariſees were diſpleaſed, and murmured; and this unreaſonable murmuring of theirs gave occaſion to the three parables in this chapter.

In which our Saviour does at once anſwer the objection of the Phariſees, and give all poſſible encouragement to the repentance of theſe great ſinners. He anſwers the Phariſees, by letting them plainly ſee, that he was about the beſt work in the world, the moſt acceptable to God, and matter of greateſt joy to all the heavenly inhabitants. Inſtead of a ſevere reproof of their uncharitableneſs, he offers that calmly to their conſideration, which ought in all reaſon to convince them, that he was no ways to blame for this familiar converſation of his with ſinners, having no other deſign upon them, but to reclaim them from their vices, and to make them fit company for the beſt of men; that he was a ſpiritual phyſician, and therefore his proper work and employment lay among his patients. And then, inſtead of terrifying theſe ſinners, who ſeemed to come with a good mind to be inſtructed by him, he gently inſinuates the moſt winning arguments and the greateſt encouragement to repentance; by ſhewing how ready God was, after all their ſins and provocations, to receive them to his grace and favour, provided they did ſincerely repent, and betake themſelves to a better courſe; and not only ſo, but that the repentance of a ſinner is a great joy to the great King of the world, and to all that holy and heavenly hoſt that attend upon him.

From which method of our Saviour in treating ſo great ſinners ſo gently, I cannot but make this obſervation, for my own uſe, as well as for others, That it is good to give, even the greateſt of ſinners, all the encouragement we can to repentance: and though men have been never ſo bad, yet if they have but this one good quality left in them, that they are patient to be inſtructed, and content to hear good counſel, we ſhould uſe them kindly, and

and endeavour to recover them by the fairest means; not so much upbraiding them for their having been bad, as encouraging them to become better.

To this purpose our Saviour uttered three parables; of *the recovery of a lost sheep*; of *finding a lost piece of money*; of *the return of a prodigal son to his father*: and though they all aim at the same scope and design, yet our Saviour useth this variety, not only to convey the same thing to several capacities in a more acceptable manner, one similitude happening to hit one person, and another another; but likewise to inculcate so weighty a matter the more upon his hearers, and to fix it more deeply in their minds.

The words which I have read are the moral or application of the first parable, concerning a man who had an hundred sheep, and, having lost one, leaves the ninety and nine to go to seek that which was lost; and having found it, with great joy brings it home. By which our Saviour gives us to understand, what joy God and the blessed spirits above take in the conversion of a sinner: *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.* Than which nothing could have been more proper, both to silence the uncharitable murmuring of the Pharisees against our Saviour for conversing with publicans and sinners, to so good an end, and likewise to encourage sinners to repent: for why should the Pharisees be displeased at that which was so great a pleasure to God and the holy angels? and what greater encouragement to repentance than this, that God is not only willing to receive the returning sinner, but that the news of his repentance is entertained in heaven with so much joy, that if it be possible for the blessed inhabitants of that place to have any thing added to their happiness, this will be a new accession to it?

There are three things in the words which require a very careful explication.

1. How we are to understand the joy that is in heaven at the conversion of a sinner?

2. Who are here meant by the *just persons, that need no repentance?*

3. With

3. With what reaſon it is here ſaid, that there is *more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine juſt perſons, who need no repentance?*

There is ſomething of difficulty in each of theſe, which deſerves our heedful and attentive conſideration.

I. How we are to underſtand the *joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner?* And this, as indeed this whole paſſage of our Saviour's, we are not to underſtand too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, but as ſpoken in a great meaſure after the manner of men, and by way of accommodation to our capacity, ſo far as the perſons here ſpoken of are capable of any addition to their joy and happineſs.

As it refers to God, it ſeems very inconſiſtent with the happineſs and perfection of the divine nature, to ſuppoſe him really capable of joy, any more than of grief, or any other paſſion; becauſe this would be to imagine ſome new acceſſion to his pleaſure and happineſs, which, being always infinite, can never have any thing added to it. And therefore we are to underſtand this as it relates to God, in the ſame manner as we do infinite other paſſages of ſcripture, where human paſſions are aſcribed to him, to be ſpoken by way of condeſcenſion, and after the language and manner of the ſons of men; and to ſignify only thus much to us, that the converſion of a ſinner is a thing highly pleaſing and acceptable to God.

As it refers to angels, and other bleſſed ſpirits, I ſee no inconvenience why it may not be underſtood more ſtrictly and literally; that they conceive a new joy at the news of a ſinner's repentance, and find a freſh pleaſure and delight ſpringing up in their minds, whenever they hear the joyful tidings of a ſinner reſcued from the ſlavery of the devil, and the danger of eternal damnation; of a new member added to the kingdom of God, that ſhall be a companion and ſharer with them in that bleſſedneſs which they enjoy. There ſeems to me to be nothing in this repugnant to the nature and happineſs of bleſſed ſpirits in another world. For it is certain, that there are degrees of happineſs among the bleſſed: from whence it neceſſarily follows, that ſome of them may be happier than they are. And it is very probable, ſince the happineſs of angels and good men is but finite, that

thoſe who are moſt happy, do continually receive new additions to their bleſſedneſs; and that their felicity is never at a ſtand, but perpetually growing and improving to all eternity; and that as their knowledge and love do increaſe, ſo likewiſe the capacity and cauſes of their happineſs are ſtill more and more enlarged and augmented: ſo that it is reaſonable enough to ſuppoſe, that there is really joy among the angels, and ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, over every ſinner that repenteth.

II. Who are here meant by the *juſt perſons who need no repentance?* That our Saviour, in this expreſſion, gives ſome glance and reflexion upon the Phariſees, (who prided themſelves in their own righteouſneſs, and, inſtead of confeſſing their ſins to God, ſtood upon their own juſtification, as if they needed no repentance), is very probable; becauſe this parable was deſigned to anſwer their murmurings againſt him for converſing with publicans and ſinners, and, by the by, to give a check to thoſe who were ſo conceited of their own righteouſneſs, as if they had no need of repentance. And this is very ſuitable to what our Saviour elſewhere ſays to them upon the like occaſion, that *the whole have no need of the phyſician, but the ſick;* that *he came not to call the righteous, but the ſinners to repentance.* But yet, though our Saviour expreſſeth himſelf ſo as that the Phariſees might with reaſon enough apply it to themſelves, that there was more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine of them, who were ſo conceited of their own righteouſneſs, that they thought they had no need of repentance, (for indeed our Saviour delivers himſelf ſo as to leave room for ſuch a ſevere application); yet I think there is little doubt to be made, but that he intended ſomething farther: and that ſuppoſing the Phariſees were as juſt as they pretended, and were really righteous men, ſo as to ſtand in no need of ſuch a repentance as great ſinners do; yet our Saviour affirms, *there was more joy in heaven over one penitent ſinner, than over ninety and nine ſuch juſt perſons.*

But are there any perſons in the world ſo juſt, as abſolutely to ſtand in need of no repentance? No; there was never any ſuch perſon in the world, him only excepted who ſaid this, our bleſſed Saviour, *who had no ſin, neither*

was

was guile found in his mouth. And therefore this phraſe, of *needing no repentance*, is to be underſtood in a qualified ſenſe, and with ſome allowance; otherwiſe our bleſſed Saviour had ſuppoſed a caſe which never was, of a great number of perfectly righteous men. And our Saviour's meaning in this is ſufficiently explained in the laſt parable of this chapter, concerning the prodigal ſon; where the prodigal ſon is the *ſinner that repented*, and his elder brother, who had always obſerved and obeyed his father, he is the *juſt perſon who needed no repentance*. So that by him our Saviour plainly deſigns thoſe who, being religiouſly educated, and brought up in the fear of God, had never broke out into any extravagant and vitious courſe of life, and ſo in ſome ſenſe had no need of repentance; that is, of changing the whole courſe of their lives, as the prodigal ſon had. Not but that the beſt of men are guilty of many faults and infirmities, which they have too much cauſe to repent of, as our Saviour ſufficiently intimates in that parable. For certainly it was no ſmall infirmity in the elder brother, to be ſo envious, and to take ſo heinouſly the joyful welcome and entertainment which his prodigal brother at his return found from his father: but yet this ſingle fault, and ſudden ſurpriſe of paſſion, conſidering the conſtant duty which he had paid to his father throughout the courſe of his life, did not make him ſuch a ſinner, as to need ſuch a repentance as his brother did; which conſiſted in a perfect change of the whole courſe of his life. And of ſuch *juſt perſons* as theſe, and of ſuch a *repentance* as this, it ſeems very plain that our Saviour intended this diſcourſe.

III. But the main difficulty of all is, with what reaſon it is here ſaid, that *there is more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine juſt perſons, which need no repentance?* Is it not better not to offend, than to ſin and repent? Is not innocence better than amendment, and the wiſdom of prevention to be preferred before that of remedy? Is it worth the while to do amiſs, to make way for repentance? And is not this almoſt like *ſinning, that grace may abound?* And if repentance be not better than righteouſneſs, why is there more joy in heaven over the penitent, than over the righteous; nay over one penitent ſinner, than over ninety and

nine juſt perſons? Do not the bleſſed always rejoice moſt in that which is really beſt? Here is the difficulty, and it requires ſome care and conſideration clearly to remove it. In order to which, be pleaſed to conſider theſe three things, which I think to be very material to the clearing of it.

1. That the ſame thing, conſidered in ſeveral reſpects, may in ſome reſpects have the advantage of another thing, and for thoſe reaſons be preferred before it; and yet not have the advantage of it abſolutely, and in all reſpects. Moral compariſons are not to be exacted to a mathematical ſtrictneſs and rigour. To this purpoſe I have obſerved, in a former diſcourſe, that it was long ſince judiciouſly noted by Ariſtotle, "That moral and prover-"bial ſpeeches are not to be taken too ſtrictly, as if they "were univerſally true, and in all caſes:" it is ſufficient if they be true for the moſt part, and in ſeveral reſpects which are very conſiderable. And of this nature are moſt of the proverbs of Solomon; and whoſoever ſhall go about to make out the truth of them in all caſes, does, in my opinion, take a very hard taſk upon himſelf. But, which is nearer to my purpoſe, our Saviour himſelf, in the chapter before my text, and in the moral application of a parable too, namely, that of the *unjuſt ſteward*, uſeth a proverbial ſpeech juſt in the ſame manner: *The children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light*; which is only a wiſe obſervation that is generally true, and in many reſpects, but not abſolutely and univerſally. For ſome men have been as wiſe and diligent for the glory of God, and intereſt of their ſouls, as ever any man was for this world, and for the advancement of his temporal intereſt. Of the like nature is this ſaying uſed by our Saviour, probably taken, as our Saviour did many other proverbial ſpeeches, from the Jews, and applied to his own purpoſe. For there are ſeveral ſayings of the Jewiſh maſters much to this purpoſe: as, "Great is the dignity of "penitents; Great is the virtue of them that repent, ſo "that no creature may ſtand in their rank and order:" and again, "The righteous may not ſtand in the ſame "place with thoſe that have repented." Theſe, I confeſs, were very high ſayings; but yet very well deſigned for

for the encouragement of repentance. And they are not without good reaſon, as will appear, if we conſider theſe two things.

1*ſt*, That the greater the difficulty of virtue is, ſo much the greater is the praiſe and commendation of it: and not only we ourſelves take the more joy and comfort in it, but it is more admirable and delightful to others. Now, it cannot be denied to be much more difficult to break off a vitious habit, than to go on in a good way which we have been trained up in, and always accuſtomed to. Thoſe that have been well educated, have great cauſe to thank God, and to acknowledge the care of their parents and teachers: for piety and goodneſs are almoſt infinitely eaſier to ſuch perſons, than to thoſe who have wanted this advantage. It is happy for them they never taſted of unlawful pleaſures; if they had, they would poſſibly have drank as deep as others. It is well they were never intangled in a ſinful courſe, nor inſlaved to vitious habits, nor *hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*; if they had, they might poſſibly never have been recovered out of the ſnare of the devil. By the happineſs of a good education, and the merciful providence of God, a great part of many mens virtue conſiſts in their ignorance of vice, and their being kept out of the way of great and dangerous temptations; rather in the good cuſtoms they have been bred up to, than in the deliberate choice of their wills; and rather in the happy preventions of evil, than in their reſolute conſtancy in that which is good. And God, who knows what is in man, and ſees to the bottom of every man's temper and inclination, knows how far this man would have fallen, had he had the temptations of other men; and how irrecoverably perhaps he would have been plunged in an evil courſe, had he once entered upon it. So that repentance is a very great thing. And though it be the moſt juſt, and fit, and reaſonable thing in the world; yet, for all that, it deſerves great commendation, becauſe it is for the moſt part ſo very hard and difficult. And therefore, though, abſolutely ſpeaking, innocence is better than repentance; yet, as the circumſtances may be, the virtue of ſome penitents may be greater than of many juſt and righteous perſons.

2*dly*, There is this conſideration farther to recommend repentance, that they who are reclaimed from a wicked courſe, are many times more thoroughly and zealouſly good afterwards. Their trouble and remorſe for their ſins, does quicken and ſpur them on in the ways of virtue and goodneſs; and a lively ſenſe of their paſt errors, is apt to make them more careful and conſcientious of their duty, more tender and fearful of offending God, and deſirous, if it were poſſible, to redeem their former miſcarriages by their good behaviour for the future. Their love to God is uſually more vehement, and burns with a brighter flame; *for to whomſoever much is forgiven, they will love much.* And they are commonly more zealous for the converſion of others; as being more ſenſible of the danger ſinners are in, and more apt to commiſerate their caſe; remembering that it was once their own condition, and with what difficulty they were reſcued from ſo great a danger. And for the moſt part great penitents are more free from pride, and contempt of others; the conſideration of what themſelves once were, being enough to keep them humble all their days. So that penitents are many times more thoroughly and perfectly good; and, after their recovery, do in ſeveral reſpects outſtrip and excel thoſe who were never engaged in a vitious courſe of life; as a broken bone that is well ſet, is ſometimes ſtronger than it was before.

2. It will conduce alſo very much to the extenuating of this difficulty, to conſider that our Saviour does not here compare repentance with abſolute innocence and perfect righteouſneſs; but with the imperfect obedience of good men, who are guilty of many ſins and infirmities, but yet, upon account of the general courſe and tenor of their lives, are, by the mercy and favour of the goſpel, eſteemed juſt and righteous perſons, and, for the merits and perfect obedience of our bleſſed Saviour, ſo accepted by God. Now, this alters the caſe very much, and brings the penitent, and this ſort of righteous perſons, much nearer to one another: ſo that, in comparing them together, the true penitent may in ſome caſes, and in ſome reſpects, have the advantage of the righteous, and deſerve upon ſome accounts to be preferred before him.

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3. Which is principally to be conſidered, for the full clearing of this difficulty; this paſſage of our Saviour is to be underſtood as ſpoken very much after the manner of men, and ſuitably to the nature of human paſſions, and the uſual occaſions of moving them. We are apt to be exceedingly affected with the obtaining of what we did not hope for, and much more with regaining of what we looked upon as loſt and deſperate. Whatever be the reaſon of it, ſuch is the nature of man, that we are not ſo ſenſibly moved at the continuance of a good which we have long poſſeſſed, as at the recovery of it after it was loſt, and gone from us. And the reaſons of a judicious value and eſteem of a ſettled pleaſure and contentment are one thing, and the cauſes of ſudden joy and tranſport another. A continued courſe of goodneſs may in itſelf be more valuable; and yet repentance, after a great fall, and long wanderings, may be much more moving and ſurpriſing: for where things are conſtant, and keep in the ſame tenor, they are not apt, in their nature, to give any new and ſudden occaſion of joy. And this is the reaſon given in the parable of the prodigal ſon; where the father tells his eldeſt ſon, who was ſo offended at the joyful reception and welcome of his prodigal brother, that *he had been always with him, and all that he had was his:* that is, he was ſenſible of his conſtant duty and obedience, than which nothing could have been more acceptable; and that it had not, nor ſhould not loſe its reward: but the return of his other ſon, after he had given over all hopes of him, and looked upon his caſe as deſperate, this was a marvellous ſurpriſe, and a happineſs beyond expectation; which is the proper and natural cauſe of joy and gladneſs: and therefore he tells him, that, upon ſuch an occaſion, *it was meet, that we ſhould make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; was loſt, and is found.* His elder ſon's continuance in his duty, was the enjoyment of what he had always had; but the return of his prodigal ſon, was the retrieving of what he had given up for loſt, and a kind of reſurrection from the dead. And thus our bleſſed Saviour, to encourage the repentance of ſinners, repreſents God after the manner of men; as if our heavenly Father did conceive ſuch a joy upon the

the repentance of a ſinner, as earthly parents are wont to do upon the return of a wild and extravagant ſon to himſelf, and his duty.

Having thus, as briefly and clearly as I could, explained the ſeveral difficulties in the text, I ſhall now deduce ſome inferences from it; and ſo conclude.

1. That the bleſſed ſpirits above have ſome knowledge of the affairs of men here below; becauſe they are ſaid to rejoice at the converſion of a ſinner. This is ſpoken more particularly of the angels; as appears by comparing what is more generally ſaid in the text, that *there is joy in heaven*, with what is more particularly expreſſed in the 10th verſe, that *there is joy in the preſence of the angels, over one ſinner that repenteth.* Now, whether the angels come to this knowledge by virtue of their miniſtry here below for the good of the elect, and ſo, in their continual intercourſe between heaven and earth, bring to their fellow-ſervants in heaven the joyful news of the repentance of ſinners upon earth; or whether God be pleaſed from time to time to reveal it to them, as a thing extremely welcome and delightful to good ſpirits, and tending to the increaſe of their happineſs; as it is not very material to inquire, ſo perhaps impoſſible for us to determine.

However, it cannot from hence be concluded, that the angels or ſaints in heaven have ſuch an univerſal knowledge of our condition and affairs, as to be a reaſonable ground and warrant to us to pray to them, yea, or to deſire them to pray for us; no, though this were done without any ſolemn circumſtances of invocation: for they may very well know ſome things concerning us, wherein their own comfort and happineſs is likewiſe concerned, and yet be ignorant of all the reſt of our affairs. This one thing we are ſure they know, becauſe our Saviour hath told us ſo; but we are ſure of no more. And there is neither equal reaſon for their knowledge of our other concernments, nor is there any revelation in ſcripture to that purpoſe.

2. If God, and the bleſſed ſpirits above, rejoice at the converſion of a ſinner, ſo ſhould we too; and not fret and murmur, as the Phariſees here did. This is the temper of the devil, and of very bad men, to regret and

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envy the good and happineſs of others. For it is reaſonable to believe, that proportionable to the joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner, is the grief and vexation of the devil and his inſtruments, of evil ſpirits and wicked men. And as the devil delights in deſtroying ſouls, and *goes about like a roaring lion ſeeking whom he may devour;* ſo, no doubt, he is in great rage, and gnaſheth out of very diſcontent, when at any time he is fruſtrated of his hopes, and the prey, which he thought himſelf ſure of, is ſnatched out of his jaws. And thus we ſee it is with bad men: they do perſecute thoſe that forſake them and their wicked ways, and refuſe to go along with them *to the ſame exceſs of riot.*

And this is no where more viſible, than among thoſe of the church of Rome. How full of wrath and indignation are they againſt thoſe who, out of pure conviction of the errors and corruptions of their church, come over to ours? How do they perſecute them with ſlanders and reproaches, and with all the effects of hatred and malice? So that many times they can ſcarce refrain from doing them a real miſchief, even where it is dangerous to themſelves to attempt it; as if they envied them the grace of God, and the opportunity of being ſaved.

I know it is too natural to thoſe of all communions, to be eager and fierce againſt thoſe that deſert them: and yet, ſuppoſing they had the truth certainly on their ſide, which they cannot all have, I ſee no great reaſon for this temper and carriage; for why ſhould I caſt away my patience, and my charity, becauſe another man hath made ſhipwreck of his faith? But I do not remember any where among mankind to have obſerved a more implacable malice, a more ſincere and hearty ill-will, than they of the church of Rome do conſtantly expreſs towards thoſe that forſake them: nay, though they give never ſo modeſt and reaſonable an account of their change, and behave themſelves towards their old friends with all the kindneſs and compaſſion in the world; yet their hatred and indignation againſt them runs ſo high, that one may plainly ſee, they would ſooner forgive a man the greateſt ſins that human nature can be guilty of, and the breach of all the ten commandments, than this one crime

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of leaving their church; that is, in truth, of growing wiſer and better.

3. The conſideration of what hath been ſaid, ſhould mightily inflame our zeal, and quicken our induſtry and diligence for the converſion of ſinners: for if the converſion of one ſoul be worth ſo much labour and pains, and matter of ſuch joy to the bleſſed God and good ſpirits, what pains ſhould not we take, in ſo corrupt and degenerate an age as this of ours; where impenitent ſinners do ſo much abound, and the juſt are almoſt failed from among the children of men?

Our bleſſed Saviour indeed, according to the extraordinary decency of all his parables, puts the caſe very charitably, and lays the ſuppoſition quite on the other ſide. If there were but one ſinner in the world, or but one of a hundred; yet we ſhould very zealouſly intend, and with all our might, the reduction of this one loſt ſheep; and ſhould never be at reſt, till this ſingle wandering ſoul were found, and ſaved. But God knows this is not our caſe, but quite otherwiſe; which ſhould quicken our endeavours ſo much the more, and make us beſtir ourſelves to the utmoſt; having always in our minds that admirable ſaying of St. James, *He that converteth a ſinner from the error of his way, ſhall ſave a ſoul from death.* He that knows the value of an immortal ſoul, and how fearful a thing it is to periſh everlaſtingly, can think no pains too much to take to *ſave a ſoul from death.*

4. Laſtly, What an argument and encouragement is here to repentance, even to the greateſt of ſinners? They, I am ſure, ſtand moſt in need of it: and though they of all others have the leaſt reaſon to look for mercy; yet they ſhall not be refuſed: though they be like the publicans and Heathens among the Jews, who were not only reputed, but many times really were the worſt of men; though, like the prodigal ſon here in the parable, they have run away from their father, and waſted their eſtate in lewd and riotous courſes; yet, whenever they come to themſelves, and are willing to return to their father, to acknowledge their folly, and repent of it, he is ready to receive them; nay much more ready to receive them, than they can be to come to him. For when the prodigal was but coming towards his father, and was

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yet afar off, the father runs to meet him, and embraceth him with as much kindneſs as if he had never offended him, and entertains him with more joy than if he had always continued with him.

How does the great God condeſcend to encourage our repentance, repreſenting himſelf and all the bleſſed company of heaven as tranſported with joy at the converſion of a ſinner, and almoſt ſetting a greater value upon repentance, than even upon innocence itſelf? And if our heavenly Father, who hath been ſo infinitely offended, and ſo highly provoked by us beyond all patience, be ſo ready, ſo forward, ſo glad to receive us, and there be no hinderance, no difficulty, no diſcouragement on his part; is it poſſible, after all this, that we can be ſuch fools, and ſuch enemies to ourſelves, as to be backward to our own happineſs! All of us, the beſt of us, have too much cauſe for repentance; and I fear too many of us ſtand in need of that repentance intended by our Saviour in the text, which conſiſts in the change of our whole lives.

But I will not upbraid you with your faults; having no deſign to provoke, but only to perſuade men. I leave it to every one's conſcience, to tell him how great a ſinner, how grievous an offender he hath been. God knows, we take no pleaſure in mentioning the ſins of men, but only in their amendment; and we would, if it were poſſible, even without minding them how bad they have been, perſuade and encourage them to be better.

It is but a ſmall conſideration, to tell you how much it would cheer and comfort our hearts, and quicken our zeal and induſtry for the ſalvation of ſouls, to ſee ſome fruit of our labours; that all our pains are not loſt, and that all the good counſel that is from hence tendered to you, is not like rain falling upon the rocks, and ſhowers upon the ſands.

But I have much greater conſiderations to offer to you; that your repentance will at once rejoice the heart of God, and angels, and men; that it is a returning to a right mind, and the reſtoring of you to yourſelves, to the eaſe and peace of your own conſciences, and to a capacity of being everlaſtingly happy; that it is to take

pity

pity upon yourſelves and your poor immortal ſouls; and to take due care to prevent that which is to be dreaded above all things, the being miſerable for ever: and, laſt of all, that, if thou wilt not repent now, the time will certainly come, and that perhaps in this life, when you ſhall ſee the greateſt need of repentance; and yet perhaps, with miſerable Eſau, *find no place for it, though you ſeek it carefully with tears*; when you *ſhall cry, Lord, Lord, and the door ſhall be ſhut againſt you; and ſhall ſeek to enter, but ſhall not be able.* To be ſure, in the other world you ſhall eternally repent to no purpoſe, and be continually lamenting your wretched condition without hopes of remedy; for *there ſhall be weeping and wailing* without effect, without intermiſſion, and without end.

And what cauſe have we to thank God that this is not yet our caſe; that we are yet on this ſide the pit of deſtruction, and the gulph of deſpair? O the infinite patience and boundleſs goodneſs of God to ſinners! With what clemency hath he ſpared us, and *ſuffered our manners* thus long? And with what kindneſs and concernment does he ſtill call upon us to leave our ſins, and to return to him, as if, in ſo doing, we ſhould make him happy, and not ourſelves? With what earneſt longings and deſires doth he wait and wiſh for our repentance, ſaying, *O that there were ſuch a heart in them! O that they would hearken unto my voice! when ſhall it once be?* Thus God is repreſented in ſcripture, as patiently attending and liſtening what effect his admonitions and counſels, his reproofs and threatenings will have upon ſinners, Jer. viii. 6. *I hearkened and I heard, but they ſpake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedneſs, ſaying, What have I done? every one turned to his courſe, as the horſe ruſheth into the battle.*

And is not this our caſe? God hath long waited for our repentance; and once a-year we ſolemnly pretend to ſet about it: but many of us hitherto, I fear, inſtead of returning to God, have but more blindly and furiouſly run on in our courſe, *like the horſe that has no underſtanding*; yea, in this more brutiſh than the beaſt, that he ruſheth into the battle without any conſideration of death or danger, and deſtroys himſelf without a ſyllogiſm. But we ſinners have

have reaſon, and yet are mad. The greateſt part of evil-doers are ſufficiently ſenſible of the danger of their courſe, and convinced that eternal miſery and ruin will be the end of it; and yet, I know not how, they make a ſhift upon one pretence or other to diſcourſe and reaſon themſelves into it.

But, becauſe *the word of God is quick and powerful, and ſharper than a two-edged ſword*, and comes with a greater weight and force upon the minds of men than any human perſuaſion whatſoever, I will conclude all with thoſe ſhort and ſerious counſels and exhortations of God to ſinners by his holy prophets.

Conſider, and ſhew yourſelves men, O ye tranſgreſſors. Be inſtructed, O Jeruſalem, leſt my ſoul depart from thee. Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Repent, and turn yourſelves from all your tranſgreſſions; ſo iniquity ſhall not be your ruin.

SERMON XVII.

Of the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.

MATTH. xii. 31. 32.

Wherefore I ſay unto you, All manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men: but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men.

And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

THE occaſion of theſe words of our bleſſed Saviour was, the blaſphemy of the Phariſees againſt that divine power by which he wrought his miracles, and particularly did caſt out devils. Which works of his; though they were wrought by the Spirit of God, yet they obſtinately and maliciouſly imputed them to the power of the devil. Upon which our Saviour takes occaſion to

declare the danger of the ſin, which he calls *blaſpheming of the Holy Ghoſt*; and tells them, that this was ſo great a ſin above all other, that it is in a peculiar manner unpardonable: *Wherefore I ſay unto you*, &c.

For the explaining of theſe words, and the nature and unpardonableneſs of this ſin, we will inquire into theſe four things.

1. What is the difference between *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man*, and *ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt?*

2. Wherein the nature of this ſin, or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, doth conſiſt?

3. In what ſenſe this ſin is here ſaid to be peculiarly unpardonable? And,

4. Upon what account it is ſo?

1. What is the difference between *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man*, and *ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt?* The reaſon of this inquiry is, becauſe the text plainly puts a great difference between them, though it be not obvious to diſcern where it lies. For our Saviour tells us, that *whoſoever ſpeaks a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him; but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall never be forgiven him:* and yet this blaſphemy of the Phariſees againſt the Holy Ghoſt was ſpeaking againſt the Son of man. For to ſay he caſt out devils by the power of the devil, though it was a blaſpheming of the Holy Ghoſt, by whoſe power he wrought theſe miracles; yet it was likewiſe a blaſpheming of Chriſt himſelf; and was in effect to ſay, that he was no true prophet, nor did come from God, but was a magician and impoſtor.

For the removing of this difficulty, I ſhall not need to ſay, as ſome learned men have done, that by *the Son of man* is here to be underſtood any man, and that our Saviour is not particularly deſigned by it. That ſeems very hard, when our Saviour is ſo frequently in the goſpel called *the Son of man:* and eſpecially when St. Luke, reciting theſe words, does immediately before give him this very title, to put the matter out of all doubt, Luke xii. 8. 9. 10. *Alſo I ſay unto you, Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him ſhall the Son of man alſo confeſs before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men, ſhall be denied before the angels of God.* Upon which it follows, *And whoſoever ſhall ſpeak a word againſt the Son*

of

of man, it ſhall be forgiven him. So that in all reaſon the Son of man is the very ſame perſon that had this title given him in the foregoing words, *viz.* our bleſſed Saviour. So that I take it for granted, that by *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man* is here meant ſpeaking againſt Chriſt; and by ſpeaking againſt him, as it is oppoſed to ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt, is meant all thoſe reproaches and contumelies which they caſt upon our Saviour's perſon, without reflecting upon that divine power which he teſtified by his miracles: as, their reproaching him with the meanneſs of his birth, *Is not this the carpenter's ſon?* with the place of it, as they ſuppoſed, *Out of Galilee ariſeth no prophet:* their reflecting upon his life, ſaying that he was *a wine-bibber, and a glutton, a friend of publicans and ſinners:* with many other calumnies which they maliciouſly caſt upon him.

But by *ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt* is meant their blaſpheming and reproaching that divine power whereby he wrought his miracles; which though it did at laſt likewiſe reflect upon our Saviour's perſon, yet it was an immediate reflexion upon the Holy Ghoſt, and a blaſpheming of him: and therefore it is called *ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, by way of diſtinction or oppoſition to the other calumnies which they uſed againſt our Saviour; which were proper blaſphemies and reproaches of his perſon, but not of the Holy Ghoſt alſo, as this was. This ſeems to me to be the true difference here intended by our Saviour, between *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man*, and *ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt*. Let us, in the

II. Second place, inquire wherein the nature of this ſin, or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, doth conſiſt. And the true nature of this ſin, though it be ſo plainly to be gathered from our Saviour's deſcription of it, yet, I know not how, a great many learned men have made a hard ſhift to miſtake it. Some have made it to be final impenitency, becauſe that is unpardonable. But why that, rather than any thing elſe that is bad, ſhould be called a blaſpheming of the Holy Ghoſt, it is hard to give a reaſon. Others have placed the nature of it in a wilful and obſtinate oppoſition of the truth: which though it be a great ſin, and included in the ſin here ſpoken of, or a concomitant of it; yet there is great reaſon to be-

lieve, that this is not all that is here meant by it. Others would have it to conſiſt in a malicious oppoſition of the truth, when men know and are convinced that it is the truth. Which is a great ſin indeed, if ever any man were guilty of it. But it is a great queſtion whether human nature be capable of it. A man may indeed have ſufficient means of conviction, and yet not be convinced; but it is hardly imaginable, that a man ſhould oppoſe the truth, when he is actually convinced that it is the truth. And, to mention no more, others think it to conſiſt in a renouncing of the truth for fear of ſuffering; which made Francis Spira to think that he had committed this ſin.

But, with all due reſpect to the judgment of others, I cannot think that any of theſe is the ſin our Saviour here deſcribes; as I ſhall endeavour plainly to ſhew, by conſidering the occaſion of our Saviour's mentioning of it, the perſons upon whom our Saviour chargeth this ſin, and upon what account he chargeth them with it.

At the 22d verſe of this chapter, there was brought to our Saviour *one poſſeſſed with a devil, blind and dumb; and he healed him.* Upon this *the people were amazed, and ſaid, Is not this the ſon of David?* that is, the Meſſias. The Phariſees hearing this, with great bitterneſs and contempt ſaid, *This fellow doth not caſt out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils.* Upon this our Saviour repreſents to them the unreaſonableneſs of this calumny; and that upon theſe two conſiderations. 1. That it was very unlikely that the devil ſhould lend him this power to uſe it againſt himſelf: *Every kingdom divided againſt itſelf, is brought to deſolation; and every city or houſe divided againſt itſelf, ſhall not ſtand. And if Satan caſt out Satan, he is divided againſt himſelf; how ſhall then his kingdom ſtand?* 2. Our Saviour tells them, they might with as much reaſon attribute all miracles to the devil. There were thoſe among themſelves who caſt out devils in the name of the God of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob; as Origen, and Tertullian, and Juſtin Martyr, tell us. Of theſe our Saviour ſpeaks, and aſks the Phariſees, *by what power they caſt them out?* But they acknowledged, that theſe did it by the power of God; and there was no cauſe, but their malice, why they ſhould not have acknowledged

that

that he did it likewiſe by the ſame power; ℣ 27. *If I by Beelzebub caſt out devils, by whom do your children caſt them out? therefore they ſhall be your judges;* that is, this may be ſufficient to convince you of malice to me. *But if I caſt out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you;* that is, the Meſſias is come, becauſe he wrought theſe and other miracles to prove that he was the Meſſias. And then it follows, *Wherefore I ſay unto you, All manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men.*

So that the Phariſees are the perſons charged with this ſin, or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt. And their blaſphemy was plainly this, that when he caſt out devils by the Spirit of God, they ſaid he did it by the power of the devil; they maliciouſly aſcribed theſe works of the Holy Ghoſt to the devil.

And that this is the ground why our Saviour chargeth them with this ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, is yet more plain from St. Mark, Mark iii. 28. 29. 30. *Verily I ſay unto you, All ſins ſhall be forgiven unto the ſons of men, and blaſphemies wherewith ſoever they ſhall blaſpheme: but he that blaſphemeth againſt the Holy Ghoſt, hath never forgiveneſs, but is in danger of eternal damnation: becauſe they ſaid, He hath an unclean ſpirit;* that is, becauſe the Phariſees charged him to be a magician, and to have a familiar ſpirit, by whoſe aſſiſtance he did thoſe works; when in truth he did them by the Spirit of God: therefore our Saviour declares them guilty of this ſin of blaſpheming the Holy Ghoſt, which ſhould never be forgiven.

So that the nature of this ſin did conſiſt in a moſt malicious oppoſition to the utmoſt evidence that could be given to the truth of any religion. Our bleſſed Saviour, to ſhew that he was ſent by God, and came from him, wrought miracles, ſuch as did plainly evidence a divine power and preſence accompanying him. For in St. Luke he is ſaid to do them *by the finger of God*, Luke xi. 20. *By the finger of God;* that is, to do ſuch things as were undeniable evidences of the divine power and preſence. And this is the utmoſt teſtimony that God ever gave to any perſon that was ſent by him. And the Phariſees were eye-witneſſes of thoſe miracles which our Saviour

wrought, ſo that they could not deny them; yet ſuch was their oppoſition to him and his doctrine, that though they ſaw theſe things done by him, and could not deny the reality of them, yet, rather than they would own him to be the Meſſias, and his doctrine to come from God, they moſt maliciouſly and unreaſonably aſcribed them to the power of the devil. And this was the blaſphemy which they were guilty of againſt the Holy Ghoſt. And herein lay the greatneſs of their ſin, in reſiſting the evidence of thoſe miracles which were ſo plainly wrought by the Holy Ghoſt; and which though themſelves ſaw, yet they maliciouſly imputed them to the devil, rather than they would be convinced by them. And this is ſo very plain, that hardly any man that conſiders our Saviour's diſcourſe upon this occaſion, can otherwiſe determine the nature of this ſin; eſpecially if he do but attend to thoſe remarkable words which I cited before, Mark iii. 29. *But he that blaſphemeth againſt the Holy Ghoſt, hath never forgiveneſs, but is in danger of eternal damnation: becauſe they ſaid, He hath an unclean ſpirit.* I come now to the

III. Third thing I propounded, namely, In what ſenſe this ſin is here ſaid to be peculiarly unpardonable? for this ſin our Saviour poſitively affirms to be in this different from all other ſins, that it is capable of no pardon: *I ſay unto you, All manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men.* And to ſhew what he means by the not forgiving of it, he tells us, that eternal puniſhment ſhall follow it in the other world: *Whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall never be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.* Which St. Mark expreſſeth more plainly, that it ſhall bring thoſe who are guilty of it to eternal damnation, Mark iii. 29. *He that blaſphemeth againſt the Holy Ghoſt, hath never forgiveneſs, but is liable to eternal damnation.* So that when our Saviour ſays, *it ſhall never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come,* he does not intend to inſinuate, that ſome ſins which are not forgiven in this world, may be forgiven in the other; but in theſe words he either alludes to the opinion of the Jews concerning the effect of the higheſt excommunication,

communication, the ſentence whereof they held not to be reverſible, neither in this world, nor the other; or elſe the reaſon of this expreſſion may probably be, to meet with a common and falſe opinion amongſt the Jews, which was, that ſome ſins which are not pardoned to men in this life, may by ſacrifices be expiated in the other; and therefore he ſays it ſhall never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor the other; and St. Mark more plainly, that thoſe who are guilty of it, ſhall *never have forgiveneſs*, but *be liable to eternal damnation*. So that our Saviour's meaning ſeems plainly to be this, that this ſin is altogether incapable of forgiveneſs. I know ſome have endeavoured to mollify this matter, but I think without ſufficient reaſon. Grotius underſtands the words comparatively, that any ſort of ſin ſhall ſooner be forgiven, than this againſt the Holy Ghoſt; and that our Saviour only intended to expreſs the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of this ſin above others, in which reſpect the pardon of it would be more difficult than of any other ſin; but yet that the caſe of ſuch a perſon is not abſolutely deſperate. But if our Saviour had intended to ſay, that this ſin was abſolutely unpardonable, I would fain know how could he have expreſſed the matter in higher and fuller words? Dr. Hammond mollifies the words another way, that this ſin ſhall never be pardoned, but upon a particular repentance for it: as if our Saviour's meaning was, that a general repentance, which was ſufficient for ſins of ignorance, would not be ſufficient in this caſe; but there muſt be a particular repentance for it, without which it would never be pardoned. But this is by no means agreeable to the ſcope of our Saviour's diſcourſe; becauſe he plainly intends to difference this from all other ſorts of ſins: *I ſay unto you, All manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men.* But, according to this interpretation, our Saviour muſt mean, that all other ſins would be forgiven upon a general repentance: which is not true: for there are many other ſins beſides ſins of ignorance; there are wilful and heinous ſins, ſuch as wilful murder, and adultery, and blaſphemy, that only excepted which is againſt the Holy Ghoſt, and the like groſs ſins, which all divines hold, ſhall not be forgiven, but upon a particular repentance. So that this interpretation

tation does not ſufficiently difference this ſin from all other ſorts of ſins, which, it is yet very plain, our Saviour intended to do. It remains then, that theſe words muſt in all reaſon be underſtood abſolutely, that the perſons that are guilty of this great ſin, ſhall never have it forgiven unto them. And it may be this will not ſeem ſo harſh, when we have conſidered, in the

IV. Fourth place, How it comes to paſs that this ſin is above all others incapable of pardon? and that upon theſe two accounts.

1. Becauſe, by this ſin, men reſiſt their laſt remedy, and oppoſe the beſt and utmoſt means of their conviction. What can God be imagined to do more, to convince a man of a divine revelation, or of the truth of any doctrine or meſſage that comes from him, than to work miracles to this purpoſe? and what greater aſſurance can men have that miracles are wrought, than to be eye-witneſſes of them themſelves? and if men will reſiſt ſuch evidence, what can God do more for their ſatisfaction? If, when men ſee plain miracles wrought, they will ſay, that it is not the power of God that does them, but the power of the devil; and if, when men ſee the devils caſt out, they will ſay that the devil conſpires againſt himſelf: this is to outface the ſun at noon-day, and there is no way left to convince ſuch perverſe perſons of the truth of any divine revelation. So that there is no remedy but ſuch perſons muſt continue in their oppoſition to the truth. For this is ſuch a ſin, as does in its own nature ſhut out and prevent all remedy. And he that thus perverſely and maliciouſly oppoſeth the truth, muſt upon the ſame grounds unavoidably continue in his oppoſition to it; becauſe there is nothing left to be done for his conviction, more than is already done. If God ſhould ſend a perſon immediately from heaven to him to convince him of his error, he can give him no greater teſtimony that he comes from God than miracles: and if, when God enables that perſon to work theſe by the power of his Spirit, this man will obſtinately impute them to the power of the devil, he defeats all the imaginable means of his own conviction. So that it is no wonder if that ſin be unpardonable, which reſiſts the laſt and utmoſt means which God hath ever yet thought fit to uſe to bring men

to

to repentance and ſalvation. And if God were willing to reveal himſelf, and the way to pardon and ſalvation, to ſuch a one, he doth by this very temper and diſpoſition render himſelf incapable of being ſatisfied and convinced concerning any divine revelation.

2. Becauſe this ſin is of that high nature, that God is therefore juſtly provoked to withdraw his grace from ſuch perſons; and it is probable reſolved ſo to do; without which grace they will continue impenitent. There is no doubt but God, if he will, can work ſo powerfully upon the minds of men by his grace and Spirit, as to convince the moſt obſtinate; and ſuppoſing them to be convinced, and repent, it cannot be denied but that they would be forgiven. And therefore, when our Saviour here ſays they ſhall not be forgiven, it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that he means, that, when perſons are come to that degree of obſtinacy and malice, God will, as juſtly he may, withdraw his grace from them: *His Spirit will not ſtrive with them*, to overcome their obſtinacy, but will leave them to the bias of their own perverſe and malicious minds; which will ſtill engage them in a farther oppoſition to the truth, and finally ſink them into perdition. So that, being deſerted by God, and for want of the neceſſary help and aid of his grace, juſtly withdrawn from them, continuing finally impenitent, they become incapable of forgiveneſs, both in this world, and that which is to come. And there is nothing that can ſeem harſh or unreaſonable in this, to thoſe who grant, as I think all men do, that God may be ſo provoked by men as juſtly to withdraw his grace from them in this life, that grace which is neceſſary to their repentance. And ſurely, if any provocation be likely to do it, this cannot be denied to be of all others the greateſt, obſtinately and maliciouſly to oppoſe the utmoſt evidence that God ever gave to the truth of any doctrine revealed by him. And of this the Phariſees, who are here charged with this ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, were notoriouſly guilty, in reſiſting the clear evidence of our Saviour's miracles.

And thus I have done with the four things I propounded to inquire into from theſe words, namely, the difference between *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man*, and *ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt*; wherein the nature of this

this ſin, or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, does conſiſt; and in what ſenſe this ſin is ſaid to be unpardonable; and upon what account it is ſo; namely, becauſe men by this ſin reſiſt their laſt remedy, and oppoſe the beſt and utmoſt means of their conviction; and becauſe it may reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that, upon a provocation of this high nature, God may, and is reſolved to withdraw that grace from ſuch perſons which is neceſſary to their repentance, without which their ſin remains for ever unpardonable.

All that now remains is, to make this diſcourſe ſome way or other uſeful to ourſelves. And it may very well ſerve to theſe two purpoſes. 1. To comfort ſome very good and pious perſons, who are liable to deſpair, out of an apprehenſion that they have committed this ſin. 2. To caution others againſt the approaches to it.

1. To comfort ſome very good and pious perſons, who are liable to deſpair, upon an apprehenſion that they have committed this great and unpardonable ſin; and conſequently are utterly incapable of ever being reſtored to the mercy and favour of God. And nothing can be more for the comfort of ſuch perſons, than to underſtand aright what the nature of this ſin is, and wherein the heinouſneſs of it doth conſiſt; which I have endeavoured to manifeſt. And if this be the nature of it which I have declared, as it ſeems very plain that it is, then I cannot ſee how any perſon now is likely to be in thoſe circumſtances as to be capable of committing it. And being a ſin of ſo heinous a nature, and declared by our Saviour to be abſolutely unpardonable, there is no reaſon to extend it beyond the caſe to which our Saviour applies it; which was, the reſiſting of the evidence of the miracles which were wrought for the truth of Chriſtianity by thoſe who were eye-witneſſes of them; that is, by thoſe who had the utmoſt aſſurance of them that human nature is capable of: and not only a bare reſiſtance of that evidence, but with a very malicious circumſtance, ſo as to impute thoſe works which were wrought by the Holy Ghoſt, to the power of the devil. This was the caſe of the Phariſees, whom our Saviour chargeth with this ſin. And no body hath warrant to extend this ſin any farther than this caſe; and without good warrant, it

it would be the moſt uncharitable thing in the world to extend it any farther.

That which comes neareſt to it, both in the heinouſneſs of the crime, and the unpardonableneſs of it, is total apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity, after the embracing of it, and full conviction of the truth of it. And this the ſcripture ſeems to place, if not in the ſame rank, yet very near to it. And of this the Apoſtle ſpeaks very often in the epiſtle to the Hebrews under the name of *unbelief*, and *ſin*, by way of eminence, as being the great ſin that Chriſtians were in danger of falling into, called in that epiſtle (Heb. xii. 1.) ἡ εὐπερίστατος ἁμαρτία, the ſin which Chriſtians, by reaſon of the circumſtances they were then in, were eſpecially ſubject to: and he parallels it with the caſe of the Jews in the wilderneſs, concerning whom *God ſware that they ſhould not enter into his reſt*, namely, the earthly Canaan, which was a type of heaven, chap. iii. 18: and chap. vi. 4. 5. 6. more expreſsly: *For it is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlightened, and have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they ſhould fall away, to renew them again to repentance*; where, by *impoſſible*, the leaſt that can be meant is, that it is extremely difficult for ſuch perſons to recover themſelves by repentance. And it is obſervable, that thoſe perſons are ſaid to have been *partakers of the Holy Ghoſt*; by which is meant, that they were endued with a power of miracles by the Holy Ghoſt, or were under the conviction of them, as having ſeen them wrought by others. So that this apoſtaſy may be ſaid in that reſpect to be a ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. So likewiſe, chap. x. 26. *If we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth*, (that is, if we apoſtatiſe from Chriſtianity after we have embraced the profeſſion of it, as appears plainly from the ſcope of the Apoſtle's diſcourſe), *there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin*: which expreſſion declares this ſin either to be unpardonable, or ſomething very like it. And, at the 29th verſe, thoſe perſons are ſaid to *tread under foot the Son of God, and to do deſpite unto the Spirit of grace*; which ſignifies, that the ſin there ſpoken of is more immediately committed againſt the

the Holy Spirit of God. St. Peter likewiſe declares the great danger of this ſin, 2 Pet ii. 20. *If after they have eſcaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, they are again intangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worſe with them than the beginning.* St. John likewiſe ſeems to ſpeak of this ſin of apoſtaſy, and to call it *a ſin unto death*; diſcouraging Chriſtians rather from praying for thoſe who were fallen into it; which gives great ſuſpicion, that he looked upon it as hardly pardonable: 1 John v. 16. *If any man ſee his brother ſin a ſin not unto death, he ſhall aſk, and he ſhall giue him life for thoſe that ſin not unto death. There is a ſin unto death; I do not ſay that he ſhall pray for it.* Now, that by *the ſin unto death*, the Apoſtle here means apoſtaſy from the Chriſtian religion to the Heathen idolatry, ſeems extremely probable from what follows, ℣ 18. *We know that whoſoever is born of God, ſinneth not; but keepeth himſelf, and that wicked one toucheth him not*; that is, he preſerveth himſelf from idolatry, which the devil had ſeduced the world into: ℣ 19. *And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedneſs,* ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, *in the wicked one*; that is, under the power of the devil: *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us underſtanding to know him that is true*; that is, to diſtinguiſh between the true God and idols. And then it follows, *This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourſelves from idols.* Which laſt caution is a key to the underſtanding of all the reſt; and makes it very probable, that the ſin unto death is apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity unto idolatry: otherwiſe it is hard to imagine, how the laſt clauſe comes in, *Little children, keep yourſelves from idols.* And this is that ſin which of all others approacheth neareſt to this ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt which our Saviour ſpeaks of, and concerning the pardonableneſs of which the ſcripture ſeems to ſpeak very doubtfully. But if it were of the ſame unpardonable nature, yet this can be no trouble to thoſe perſons I am ſpeaking of, who cannot but know themſelves to be far enough from the guilt of this ſin.

As for thoſe other ſins which by ſome are taken to be the ſins againſt the Holy Ghoſt, they are either ſuch as perhaps

perhaps no man is capable of committing, as a malicious oppoſition to the truth, when I am convinced and know it to be the truth: for this ſeems to be a contradiction, to know any thing to be the truth, and to believe it to be ſo, and yet to oppoſe it; becauſe the underſtanding can no more oppoſe truth as truth, than the will can refuſe good as good: or elſe, they are ſuch as no man can know he is guilty of in this life; as final impenitency, which ſuppoſeth a man to live and die without repentance: or elſe ſuch as I think no good man is incident to; as a malicious and perverſe oppoſing of the truth after ſufficient means of conviction. However, none of theſe are that which the ſcripture deſcribes to be the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; as I have already ſhewn.

But ſtill there are two things which uſually trouble honeſt and well-meaning perſons; but are rather the effects of melancholy, than any reaſonable ground of trouble. Some think that every deliberate ſin againſt knowledge, and after conviction, is the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. This is acknowledged to be a very great aggravation of ſin, and ſuch as calls for a great and particular repentance; but does by no means render a man incapable of forgiveneſs. Others are troubled with blaſphemous thoughts; and thoſe they think to be the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. But this is generally the mere effect of melancholy; and the perſons that are troubled with theſe black thoughts, are no ways conſenting to them; but they riſe in their minds perfectly againſt their wills, and without any approbation of theirs: and in this caſe they are ſo far from being the unpardonable ſin, that I hope, yea and verily believe, they are no ſins at all, but the mere effects of a bodily diſtemper; and no more imputed to us, than the wild and idle ravings of a man in a frenzy or a fever. And God forbid that the natural effects of a bodily diſeaſe ſhould bring guilt upon our ſouls. So that theſe perſons have reaſon enough for comfort; but the miſery is, their preſent diſtemper renders them incapable of it.

2. The other uſe I would make of this diſcourſe is, to caution men againſt the degrees and approaches of this ſin. For if the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt be of ſuch a high nature, and ſo unpardonable, then all approaches

to it are very dreadful: ſuch as are, profane ſcoffing at religion, and the Holy Spirit of God which dwells in good men; abuſe of the holy ſcriptures, which were indited by the Spirit of God; perverſe infidelity, notwithſtanding all the evidence which we have for the truth of Chriſtianity, and ſufficient aſſurance of the miracles wrought for the confirmation of it, brought down to us by credible hiſtory, though we were not eye-witneſſes of them; obſtinacy in a ſinful and vitious courſe, notwithſtanding all the motives and arguments of the goſpel to perſuade men to repentance; ſinning againſt the clear conviction of our conſciences, and the motions and ſuggeſtions of God's Holy Spirit to the contrary; malicious oppoſing of the truth, when the arguments for it are very plain and evident to any impartial and unprejudiced mind, and when he that oppoſeth the truth, hath no clear ſatisfaction in his own mind to the contrary, but ſuffers himſelf to be furiouſly and headily carried on in his oppoſition to it. Theſe are all ſins of a very high nature, and of the neareſt affinity with this great and unpardonable ſin, of any that can eaſily be inſtanced in. And though God, to encourage the repentance of men, has not declared them unpardonable; yet they are great provocations; and if they be long continued in, we know not how ſoon God may withdraw his grace from us, and ſuffer us to be *hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

Be ready then to entertain the truth of God, whenever it is fairly propounded to thee, and with ſuch evidence as thou art willing to accept in other matters, where thou haſt no prejudice nor intereſt to the contrary. Do nothing contrary to thy known duty; but be careful in all things to obey the convictions of thine own conſcience, and to yield to the good motions and ſuggeſtions of God's Holy Spirit, who works ſecretly upon the minds of men, and inſpires us many times gently with good thoughts and inclinations, and is grieved when we do not comply with them, and, after many repulſes, will at laſt withdraw himſelf from us, and leave us to be aſſaulted by the temptations of the devil, and to be hurried away by our own luſts into ruin and perdition.

SER-

SERMON XVIII.

The example of Jesus in doing good.

ACTS x. 38.

——*Who went about doing good.*

WHen almighty God designed the reformation of the world, and the restoring of man to the image of God, the pattern after which he was first made, he did not think it enough to give us the most perfect laws of holiness and virtue; but hath likewise set before us a living pattern, and a familiar example, to excite and encourage us, to go before us, and shew us the way, and as it were to lead us by the hand, in the obedience of those laws. Such is the sovereign authority of God over men, that he might, if he had pleased, have only given us a law written with his own hand, as he did to the people of Israel from mount Sinai: but such is his goodness, that he had sent a great ambassador from heaven to us, *God manifested in the flesh*, to declare and interpret his will and pleasure; and not only so, but to fulfil that law himself, the observation whereof he requires of us. The bare rules of a good life are a very dead and ineffectual thing, in comparison of a living example; which shews us the possibility and practicableness of our duty; both that it may be done, and how to do it. Religion indeed did always consist in an imitation of God, and in our resemblance of those excellencies which shine forth in the best and most perfect being; but we may imitate him now with much greater ease and advantage, since God was pleased to become man, on purpose to shew us how men may become like to God. And this is one great end for which the Son of God came into the world, and *was made flesh, and dwelt among us*, and conversed so long and familiarly with mankind, that, in his own person and life, he might give us the example of all that holiness and virtue which

his laws require of us. And as he was in nothing liker the Son of God, than in being and doing good; so is he in nothing a fitter pattern for our imitation, than in that excellent character given of him here in the text, that *he went about doing good.*

In which words two things offer themselves to our consideration.

1. Our Saviour's great work and business in the world; which was, to *do good;* ὃς διῆλθεν εὐεργετῶν, who employed himself in being a benefactor to mankind. This refers more especially to his healing the bodily diseases and infirmities of men: *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil;* intimating to us, by this instance of his doing good, that he who took so much pains to rescue mens bodies from the power and possession of the devil, would not let their souls remain under his tyranny. But, though the text instanceth only in one particular, yet this general expression of *doing good* comprehends all those several ways whereby he was beneficial to mankind.

2. Here is his diligence and industry in this work: *He went about doing good;* he made it the great business and constant employment of his life.

I shall propound to you the pattern of our Saviour in both these particulars.

I. His great work and business in the world was, to *do good;* the most pleasant and delightful, the most happy and glorious work in the world. It is a work of a large extent, and of an universal influence; and comprehends in it all those ways whereby we may be useful and beneficial to one another. And indeed it were pity that so good a thing should be confined within narrow bounds and limits. It reacheth to the souls of men, and to their bodies; and is conversant in all those ways and kinds whereby we may serve the temporal or spiritual good of our neighbour, and promote his present and his future happiness. What our blessed Saviour did in this kind, and we in imitation of him ought to do, I shall reduce to these two heads. 1. Doing good to the souls of men, and endeavouring to promote their spiritual and eternal happiness. 2. The procuring of their temporal good,

good, and contributing as much as may be to their happineſs in this preſent life.

1. Doing good to the ſouls of men, and endeavouring to promote their ſpiritual and eternal happineſs, by good inſtruction, and by good example.

1ſt, By good inſtruction. And under inſtruction I comprehend all the means of bringing men to the knowledge of their duty, and exciting them to the practice of it; by inſtructing their ignorance, and removing their prejudices and rectifying their miſtakes, by perſuaſion, and by reproof, and by making laſting proviſion for the promoting of theſe ends.

By inſtructing mens ignorance. And this is a duty which every man owes to another as he hath opportunity, but eſpecially to thoſe who are under our care and charge; our children, and ſervants, and near relations, thoſe over whom we have a ſpecial authority, and a more immediate influence. This our bleſſed Saviour made his great work in the world, to inſtruct all ſorts of perſons in the things which concerned the kingdom of God, and to direct them in the way to eternal happineſs; by publick teaching, and by private converſation; and by taking occaſion, from the common occurrences of human life, and every object that preſented itſelf to him, to inſtil good counſel into men, and to raiſe their minds to the conſideration of divine and heavenly things. And though this was our Saviour's great employment, and is theirs more particularly whoſe office it is to teach others; yet every man hath private opportunities of inſtructing others, by admoniſhing them of their duty, and by directing them to the beſt means and helps of knowledge; ſuch as are books of piety and religion; with which they that are rich may furniſh thoſe who are unable to provide for themſelves.

And then by removing mens prejudices againſt the truth, and rectifying their miſtakes. This our Saviour found very difficult; the generality of thoſe with whom he had to do being ſtrongly prejudiced againſt him and his doctrine, by falſe principles, which they had taken in by education, and been trained up to by their teachers. And therefore he uſed a great deal of meekneſs in inſtructing thoſe that oppoſed themſelves, and exerciſed ab-

undance of patience in bearing with the infirmities of men, and their dulneſs and ſlowneſs of capacity to receive the truth.

And this is great charity, to conſider the inveterate prejudices of men; eſpecially thoſe which are rooted in education, and which men are confirmed in by the reverence they bear to thoſe that have been their teachers. And great allowance is to be given to men in this caſe, and time to bethink themſelves, and to conſider better: for no man that is in an error thinks he is ſo; and therefore if we go violently to rend their opinions from them, they will but hold them ſo much the faſter; but if we have patience to unrip them by degrees, they will at laſt fall in pieces of themſelves.

And when this is done, the way is open for counſel and perſuaſion. And this our Saviour adminiſtered in a moſt powerful and effectual manner, by encouraging men to repentance, and by repreſenting to them the infinite advantages of obeying his laws, and the dreadful and dangerous conſequences of breaking of them. And theſe are arguments fit to work upon mankind; becauſe there is ſomething within us that conſents to the equity and reaſonableneſs of God's laws. So that whenever we perſuade men to their duty, how backward ſoever they may be to the practice of it, being ſtrongly addicted to a contrary courſe; yet we have this certain advantage, that we have their conſciences and the moſt inward ſenſe of their minds on our ſide, bearing witneſs that what we counſel and perſuade them to, is for their good.

And, if need be, we muſt add reproof to counſel. This our Saviour did with great freedom, and ſometimes with ſharpneſs and ſeverity, according to the condition of the perſons he had to deal withal. But becauſe of his great authority, being a teacher immediately ſent from God, and of his intimate knowledge of the hearts of men, he is not a pattern to us in all the circumſtances of diſcharging this duty; which, of any other, requires great prudence and diſcretion, if we intend to do good, the only end to be aimed at in it: for many are fit to be reproved, whom yet every man is not fit to reprove; and in that caſe we muſt get it done by thoſe that are fit; and great

regard

regard muſt be had to the time and other circumſtances of doing it, ſo as it may moſt probably have its effect.

I will mention but one way of inſtruction more; and that is, by making laſting proviſion for that purpoſe; as, by founding ſchools of learning, eſpecially to teach the poor to read, which is the key of knowledge; by building of churches, and endowing them; by buying or giving in impropriations, or the like. Theſe are large and laſting ways of teaching and inſtructing others, which will continue when we are dead and gone; as it is ſaid of Abel, that *being dead he yet ſpeaks*. And this our Saviour virtually did, by appointing his Apoſtles, after he had left the world, to *go and teach all nations*; and ordering a conſtant ſucceſſion of teachers in his church, to inſtruct men in the Chriſtian religion, together with an honourable maintenance for them. This we cannot do in the way that he did, who had *all power in heaven and earth*: but we may be ſubſervient to this deſign in the ways that I have mentioned: which I humbly commend to the conſideration of thoſe whom God hath bleſſed with great eſtates, and made capable of effecting ſuch great works of charity.

2*dly*, Another way of doing good to the ſouls of men, is by good example. And this our bleſſed Saviour was in the utmoſt perfection: for he *fulfilled all righteouſneſs, had no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth*. And this we ſhould endeavour to be, as far as the frailty of our nature, and imperfection of our preſent ſtate, will ſuffer: for good example is an unſpeakable benefit to mankind, and hath a ſecret power and influence upon thoſe with whom we converſe, to form them into the ſame diſpoſition and manners. It is a living rule, that teacheth men without trouble, and lets them ſee their faults without open reproof and upbraiding: beſides that it adds great weight to a man's counſel and perſuaſion, when we ſee that he adviſes nothing but what he does, nor exacts any thing from others from which he himſelf deſires to be excuſed. As, on the contrary, nothing is more cold and inſignificant, than good counſel from a bad man; one that does not obey his own precepts, nor follow the advice which he is ſo forward to give to others.

Theſe

These are the several ways of doing good to the souls of men, wherein we, who are the disciples of the blessed Jesus, ought, in imitation of his example, to exercise ourselves according to our several capacities and opportunities. And this is the noblest charity, and the greatest kindness that can be shewn to human nature. It is in the most excellent sense to *give eyes to the blind*, to *set the prisoners at liberty*, to rescue men out of the saddest slavery and captivity, and to save souls from death. And it is the most lasting and durable benefit; because it is to do men good to all eternity.

2. The other way of being beneficial to others, is, by procuring their temporal good, and contributing to their happiness in this present life. And this, in subordination to our Saviour's great design of bringing men to eternal happiness, was a great part of his business and employment in this world. He went about *healing all manner of sicknesses and diseases*, and rescuing the bodies of men from the power and possession of the devil.

And though we cannot be beneficial to men in that miraculous manner that he was, yet we may be so in the use of ordinary means. We may comfort the afflicted, and vindicate the oppressed, and do a great many acts of charity which our Saviour, by reason of his poverty, could not do without a miracle. We may supply the necessities of those that are in want, *feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and visit the sick*, and minister to them such comforts and remedies as they are not able to provide for themselves. We may take a child that is poor, and destitute of all advantages of education, and bring him up in the knowledge and fear of God; and, without any great expence, put him into a way wherein, by his diligence and industry, he may arrive to a considerable fortune in the world, and be able afterwards to relieve hundreds of others. Men glory in raising great and magnificent structures, and find a secret pleasure to see sets of their own planting to grow up and flourish: but surely it is a greater and more glorious work, to build up a man; to see a youth of our own planting, from the small beginnings and advantages we have given him, to grow up into a considerable fortune, to take root in the world, and to shoot up to such a height, and spread his branches

branches ſo wide, that we, who firſt planted him, may ourſelves find comfort and ſhelter under his ſhadow. We may many times, with a ſmall liberality, ſhore up a family that is ready to fall, and ſtruggles under ſuch neceſſities that it is not able to ſupport itſelf. And if our minds were as great as ſometimes our eſtates are, we might do great and publick works of a general and laſting advantage, and for which many generations to come might call us bleſſed. And thoſe who are in the loweſt condition may do great good to others by their prayers, if they themſelves be as good as they ought: for *the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* The interceſſion of thoſe who are in favour with God, as all good men are, are not vain wiſhes, but many times effectual to procure that good for others which their own endeavours could never have effected and brought about.

I have done with the firſt thing, the great work and buſineſs which our bleſſed Saviour had to do in the world, and that was to do good, I proceed to the

II. Second thing contained in the text, our Saviour's diligence and induſtry in this work: *He went about doing good.* He made it the great buſineſs and conſtant employment of his life; he travelled from one place to another, to ſeek out opportunities of being uſeful and beneficial to mankind. And this will fully appear, if we briefly conſider theſe following particulars.

1. How unwearied our bleſſed Saviour was in doing good. He made it his only buſineſs, and ſpent his whole life in it. He was not only ready to do good to thoſe that came to him, and gave him opportunity for it, and beſought him to do it; but went himſelf from one place to another, to ſeek out objects to exerciſe his charity upon. He went to thoſe who could not, and to thoſe who would not come to him: for ſo it is written of him, *He came to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt.* He was contented to ſpend whole days in this work, to live in a crowd, and to be almoſt perpetually oppreſſed with company; and when his diſciples were moved at the rudeneſs of the people in preſſing upon him, he rebuked their impatience; and for the pleaſure he took in doing good, made nothing of the trouble and inconvenience that attended it.

2. If

2. If we consider how much he denied himself in the chief comforts and conveniencies of human life, that he might do good to others. He neglected the ordinary refreshments of nature, his meat and drink, and sleep, that he might attend this work. He was at every body's beck and disposal to do them good. When he was doing cures in one place, he was sent for to another; and he either went, or sent healing to them; and did by his word at a distance, what he could not come in person to do. Nay, he was willing to deny himself in one of the dearest things in the world, his reputation and good name. He was contented to do good, though he was ill thought of, and ill spoken of for it. He would not refuse to do good on the sabbath-day, though he was accounted profane for so doing. He knew how scandalous it was among the Jews to keep company with publicans and sinners, and yet he would not decline so good a work for all the ill words they gave him for it.

3. If we consider the malicious opposition and sinister construction that his good deeds met withal. Never did so much goodness meet with so much enmity, endure so many affronts, and so much *contradiction of sinners*. This great benefactor of mankind was hated and persecuted as if he had been a publick enemy. While he was instructing them in the meekest manner, they were ready to stone him for telling them the truth: and when the fame of his miracles went abroad, though they were never so useful and beneficial to mankind; yet upon this very account they conspire against him, and seek to take away his life. Whatever he said or did, though never so innocent, never so excellent, had some bad interpretation put upon it; and the great and shining virtues of his life, were turned into crimes, and matter of accusation. For his casting out of devils, he was called a magician; for his endeavour to reclaim men from their vices, *a friend of publicans and sinners*; for his free and obliging conversation, *a wine-bibber, and a glutton*. All the benefits which he did to men, and the blessings which he so liberally shed among the people, were construed to be a design of ambition and popularity, and done with an intention to move the people to sedition, and to make himself a King: enough to have discouraged the greatest goodness,

goodneſs, and have put a damp upon the moſt generous mind, and to make it ſick and weary of well-doing. For what more grievous, than to have all the good one does ill interpreted, and the beſt actions in the world made matter of calumny and reproach?

4. And then, laſtly, if we conſider how chearfully, notwithſtanding all this, he perſevered and continued in well-doing. It was not only his buſineſs, but his delight: *I delight* (ſays he) *to do thy will, O my God.* The pleaſure which others take in the moſt natural actions of life, in eating and drinking when they are hungry, he took in doing good: it was *his meat and drink to do the will of his Father.* He plied this work with ſo much diligence, as if he had been afraid he ſhould have wanted time for it: *I muſt work the work of him that ſent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.* And when he was approaching towards the hardeſt and moſt unpleaſant part of his ſervice, but of all others the moſt beneficial to us, I mean his death and ſufferings, he was not at eaſe in his mind till it was done: *How am I ſtraitened* (ſays he) *till it be accompliſhed!* And juſt before his ſuffering, with what joy and triumph does he reflect upon the good he had done in his life? *Father, I have glorified thee upon earth, and finiſhed the work which thou haſt given me to do.* What a bleſſed pattern is here of diligence and induſtry in doing good? how fair and lovely a copy for Chriſtians to write after?

And now that I have ſet it before you, it will be of excellent uſe to theſe two purpoſes; to ſhew us our defects, and to excite us to our duty.

I. To ſhew us our defects. How does this bleſſed example upbraid thoſe who live in a direct contradiction to it; who, inſtead of *going about doing good,* are perpetually intent upon doing miſchief; who are wiſe and active to do evil, but to do good have no inclination, no underſtanding? And thoſe likewiſe who, though they are far from being ſo bad, yet wholly neglect this bleſſed work of doing good? They think it very fair to do no evil, to hurt and injure no man: but if preachers will be ſo unreaſonable as to require more, and will never be ſatisfied till they have perſuaded them out of their eſtate, and to give to the poor, till they have almoſt impoveriſh-

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ed themselves, they desire to be excused from this importunity. But we are not so unreasonable neither. We desire to put them in mind, that to be charitable according to our power is an indispensable duty of religion: that we are commanded not only to abstain from evil, but to do good: and that our blessed Saviour hath given us the example of both; he did not only *do no sin*, but *he went about doing good*. And upon this nice point it was that the young rich man in the gospel and his Saviour parted. He had *kept the commandments from his youth, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal;* he had been very careful of the negative part of religion: but when it came to parting with his estate, and *giving to the poor*, this he thought too hard a condition; and upon this he forsook our Saviour, and forfeited the kingdom of heaven. And it is very considerable, and ought to be often and seriously thought upon, that our Saviour, describing to us the day of judgment, represents the great judge of the world acquitting and condemning men according to the good which they had done, or neglected to do, in ways of mercy and charity; for feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, or for neglecting to do these things. Than which nothing can more plainly and effectually declare to us the necessity of doing good, in order to the obtaining eternal happiness.

There are many indeed who do not altogether neglect the doing of this work, who yet do in a great measure prevent and hinder themselves from doing it as they ought, under a pretence of being employed about other duties and parts of religion. They are so taken up with the exercises of piety and devotion in private and publick, with prayer, and reading, and hearing sermons, and preparing themselves for the sacrament, that they have scarce any leisure to mind the doing of good and charitable offices to others: or if they have, they hope God will pardon his servants in this thing, and accept of their piety and devotion instead of all. But they ought to consider, that when these two parts of religion come in competition, devotion is to give way to charity, mercy being better than sacrifice; that the great end of all the duties of religion, prayer, and reading and hearing the word

word of God, and receiving the holy ſacrament, is, to diſpoſe and excite us to do good, to make us more ready and forward to every good work; and that it is the greateſt mockery in the world, upon pretence of uſing the means of religion, to neglect the end of it; and becauſe we are always preparing ourſelves to do good, to think that we are for ever excuſed from doing any.

Others are taken up in contending for the faith, and ſpend all their zeal and heat about ſome controverſies in religion; and therefore they think it but reaſonable, that they ſhould be excuſed from thoſe meaner kind of duties; becauſe they ſerve God, as they imagine, in a higher and more excellent way: as thoſe who ſerve the King in his wars, uſe to be exempted from taxes and offices. But do thoſe men conſider upon what kind of duties more eſpecially our bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles lay the great weight and ſtreſs of religion? that it is to the meek, and merciful, and peaceable, that our Saviour pronounceth bleſſedneſs? that *pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction?* that *the wiſdom which is from above, is full of mercy and good works?* Theſe are the great and weighty things of religion, which, whatever elſe we do, ought not to be left undone. Do they conſider that a right faith is wholly in order to a good life, and is of no value any farther than it hath an influence upon it; ſo that, whatever other duties we may be obliged to, nothing can excuſe us from this? How much better is it to do good, to be really uſeful and beneficial to others, and how much more clearly and certainly our duty, than to quarrel about doubtful and uncertain opinions? Were men Chriſtians indeed, they would be ſo much delighted and taken up with this better work, (more acceptable to God, and more profitable to men), that they could not find leiſure, or, if they could, they could not find in their hearts to employ all their time and zeal about things which are at ſo great a diſtance from the life and heart of religion, as moſt of thoſe queſtions are which Chriſtians at this day contend and languiſh about. Were we poſſeſſed with the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, theſe would be but dry, and inſipid, and taſteleſs things to us, in compariſon of the bleſſed employment of doing

good in a more real and substantial way. If the sincere love of God and our neighbour were but once thoroughly kindled in our hearts, these pure and heavenly flames would in a great measure extinguish the unchristian heats of dispute and contention; as fires here below are ready to languish and go out, when the sun in his full strength shines upon them.

II. But the hardest part of my task is yet behind; and it is strange it should be so; and that is, to persuade us to the imitation of this blessed example. Let us *go and do likewise; let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus;* let us tread in the steps of the great God, and the best man that ever was, our blessed Saviour, who *went about doing good.* Methinks the work itself is of that nature, that men should not need to be courted to it by persuasion, nor urged by importunity. The very proposal of the thing, and the pattern which I have set before you, is temptation and allurement enough to a generous and well-disposed mind. But yet, to inflame you the more to so good a work, be pleased to dwell with me a little upon these following considerations.

1. It is an argument of a great and generous mind, to employ ourselves in doing good, to extend our thoughts and care to the concernments of others, and to use our power and endeavours for their benefit and advantage; because it shews an inclination and desire in us to have others happy as well as ourselves.

Those who are of a narrow and envious spirit, of a mean and sordid disposition, love to contract themselves within themselves, and, like the hedgehog, to shoot out their quills at every one that comes near them. They take care of no body but themselves; and foolishly think their own happiness the greater, because they have it alone, and to themselves. But the noblest and most heavenly dispositions think themselves happiest when others share with them in their happiness. Of all beings, God is the farthest removed from envy; and the nearer any creature approacheth to him in blessedness, the farther is it off from this hellish quality and disposition. It is the temper of the devil, to grudge happiness to others; he

he envied that man ſhould be in paradiſe, when he was caſt out of heaven.

Other perfections are (as one ſays) of a more melancholick and ſolitary diſpoſition, and ſhine brighteſt when they are alone, or attained to but by a few; once make them common, and they loſe their luſtre. But it is the nature of goodneſs to communicate itſelf; and the farther it ſpreads, the more glorious it is. God reckons it as one of his moſt glorious titles, as the brighteſt gem in his diadem, *The Lord mighty to ſave*. He delights not to ſhew his ſovereignty, in ruining the innocent, and deſtroying helpleſs creatures; but in reſcuing them out of the jaws of hell and deſtruction. To the devil belongs the title of *the deſtroyer*.

Without this quality of goodneſs, all other perfections would change their nature, and loſe their excellency. Great power and wiſdom would be terrible, and raiſe nothing but dread and ſuſpicion in us: for power, without goodneſs, would be tyranny and oppreſſion, and wiſdom would become craft and treachery. A being endued with knowledge and power, and yet wanting goodneſs, would be nothing elſe but an irreſiſtible evil, and an omnipotent miſchief. We admire knowledge, and are afraid of power, and ſuſpect wiſdom; but we can heartily love nothing but goodneſs, or ſuch perfections as are in conjunction with it. For knowledge and power may be in a nature moſt contrary to God's; the devil hath theſe perfections in an excelling degree. When all is done, nothing argues a great and generous mind, but only goodneſs; which is a propenſion and diſpoſition to make others happy, and a readineſs to do them all the good offices we can.

2. To do good, is the moſt pleaſant employment in the world. It is natural; and whatever is ſo, is delightful. We do like ourſelves, whenever we relieve the wants and diſtreſſes of others. And therefore this virtue, among all other, hath peculiarly intitled itſelf to the name of *humanity*. We anſwer our own nature, and obey our reaſon, and ſhew ourſelves men, in ſhewing mercy to the miſerable. Whenever we conſider the evils and afflictions of others, we do, with the greateſt reaſon, collect our duty from our nature and inclination, and make

our own wishes, and desires, and expectations from others, a law and rule to ourselves. And this is pleasant, to follow our nature, and to gratify the importunate dictates of our own reason. So that the benefits we do to others, are not more welcome to them that receive them, than they are delightful to us that do them. We ease our own nature and bowels, whenever we help and relieve those who are in want and necessity. As, on the contrary, no man that hath not divested himself of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling some pain in himself. There is no sensual pleasure in the world, comparable to the delight and satisfaction that a good man takes in doing good. This Cato, in Tully, boasts of as the great comfort and joy of his old age, "That nothing was more pleasant to him than the "conscience of a well-spent life, and the remembrance "of many benefits and kindnesses done to others." Sensual pleasures are not lasting, but presently vanish and expire: but that is not the worst of them; they leave a sting behind them: as the pleasure goes off,

——*Succedit frigida cura;*

sadness and melancholy come in the place of it; guilt, and trouble, and repentance follow it. But the pleasure of doing good remains after a thing is done; the thoughts of it lie easy in our minds, and the reflexion upon it afterwards does for ever minister joy and delight to us. In a word, that frame of mind which inclines us to do good, is the very temper and disposition of happiness. Solomon, after all his experience of worldly pleasures, pitches at last upon this as the greatest felicity of human life, and the only good use that is to be made of a prosperous and plentiful fortune, Eccl. iii. 12. *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good in his life.* And a greater and a wiser than Solomon hath said, that *it is more blessed to give, than to receive.*

3. To employ ourselves in doing good, is to imitate the highest excellency and perfection. It is to be like God, who is good, and doth good; and to be like him in that which he esteems his greatest glory; and that is his goodness. It is to be like the Son of God; who, when

when he took our nature upon him, and lived in the world, *went about doing good.* It is to be like the bleſſed angels, whoſe great employment it is, to be *miniſtring ſpirits* for the good of others. To be charitable, and helpful, and beneficial to others, is to be a good angel, and a Saviour, and a God to men. And the example of our bleſſed Saviour more eſpecially is the great pattern which our religion propounds to us. And we have all the reaſon in the world to be in love with it; becauſe that very goodneſs which it propounds to our imitation, was ſo beneficial to ourſelves. When we ourſelves feel and enjoy the happy effects of that good which he did in the world, this ſhould mightily endear the example to us, and make us forward to imitate that love and kindneſs, to which we are indebted for ſo many bleſſings, and upon which all our hopes of happineſs do depend.

And there is this conſiderable difference between our Saviour's charity to us, and ours to others: he did all purely for our ſakes, and for our benefit; whereas all the good we do to others, is a greater good done to ourſelves. They indeed are beholden to us for the kindneſs we do them, and we to them for the opportunity of doing it. Every ignorant perſon that comes in our way to be inſtructed by us, every ſinner whom we reclaim, every poor man we relieve, is a happy opportunity of doing good to ourſelves, and of *laying up for ourſelves a good treaſure againſt the time which is to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life.* By this principle the beſt and the happieſt man that ever was, governed his life and actions; eſteeming it a *more bleſſed thing to give than to receive.*

4. This is one of the greateſt and moſt ſubſtantial duties of religion; and, next to the love and honour which we pay to God himſelf, the moſt acceptable ſervice that we can perform to him. It is one half of the law, and next to the firſt and great commandment, and very like unto it; like to it in the excellency of its nature, and in the neceſſity of its obligation. For *this commandment we have from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother alſo.* The firſt commandment excels in the dignity of the object; but the ſecond hath the advantage in the reality of its effects: *For our righteouſneſs extendeth not*

to God, we can do him no real benefit; but our charity to men is really useful and beneficial to them. For which reason, God is contented, in many cases, that the external honour and worship which by his positive command he requires of us, should give way to that natural duty of love and mercy which we owe to one another. And, to shew how great a value he puts upon charity, he hath made it the great testimony of our love to himself; and, for want of it, rejects all other professions of love to him as false and insincere: *If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

5. This is that which will give us the greatest comfort when we come to die. It will then be no pleasure to men, to reflect upon the great estates they have got, and the great places they have been advanced to; because they are leaving these things, and they will stand them in no stead in the other world: *Riches profit not in the day of wrath*: but the conscience of well-doing will refresh our souls even under the very pangs of death. With what contentment does a good man then look upon the good he hath done in his life? and with what confidence doth he look over into the other world, where he hath provided for himself *bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not?* For though our estates will not follow us into the other world, our good works will; though we cannot carry our riches along with us, yet we may send them before us, to make way for our reception into everlasting habitations. In short, works of mercy and charity will comfort us at the hour of death, and plead for us at the day of judgment, and procure for us at the hands of a merciful God a glorious recompence at the resurrection of the just. Which leads me to the

6. Last consideration I shall offer you; which is, the reward of doing good, both in this world, and the other. If we believe God himself, he hath made more particular and encouraging promises to this grace and virtue, than to any other.

The advantages of it in this world are many and great. It is the way to derive a lasting blessing upon our estates.

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Acts of charity are the best deeds of settlement. We gain the prayers and blessings of those to whom we extend our charity; and it is no small thing to have *the blessing of them that are ready to perish to come upon us:* for God *hears the prayers of the destitute, and his ear is open to their cry.* Charity is a great security to us in times of evil; and that not only from the special promise and providence of God, which are engaged to preserve from want those that relieve the necessities of others; but likewise from the nature of the thing, which makes way for its own reward in this world. He that is charitable to others, provides a supply and retreat for himself in the day of distress: for he provokes mankind, by his example, to like tenderness towards him, and prudently bespeaks the commiseration of others against it comes to be his turn to stand in need of it. Nothing in this world makes a man more and surer friends, than charity and bounty, and such as will stand by us in the greatest troubles and dangers: *For a good man* (says the Apostle) *one would even dare to die.* It is excellent counsel of the son of Sirach, *Lay up thy treasure according to the commandment of the most High, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold. Shut up thy alms in thy storehouse, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction; it shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield and strong spear.* It hath sometimes happened, that the obligation that men have laid upon others by their charity, hath, in case of danger and extremity, done them more kindness than all the rest of their estate could do for them; and their alms have literally delivered them from death.

But what is all this to the endless and unspeakable happiness of the next life, where the returns of doing good will be vastly great, beyond what we can now expect or imagine? For God takes all the good we do to others, as a debt upon himself; and he hath estate and treasure enough to satisfy the greatest obligations we can lay upon him. So that we have the truth, and goodness, and sufficiency of God for our security, that what we scatter and sow in this kind, will grow up to a plentiful harvest in the other world; and that all our pains and expence in doing good for a few days, will be recompensed and crowned with the joys and glories of eternity.

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SERMON XIX.

On the fifth of November, 1678. Before the Honourable house of Commons.

LUKE ix. 55. 56.

But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.

AMong many other things which may justly recommend the Christian religion to the approbation of mankind, the intrinsick goodness of it is most apt to make impression upon the minds of serious and considerate men. The miracles of it are the great external evidence and confirmation of its truth and divinity: but the morality of its doctrines and precepts, so agreeable to the best reason and wisest apprehensions of mankind, so admirably fitted for the perfecting of our natures, and the sweetening of the spirits and tempers of men, so friendly to human society, and every way so well calculated for the peace and order of the world; these are the things which our religion glories in, as her crown and excellency. Miracles are apt to awaken and astonish; and, by a sensible and overpowering evidence, to bear down the prejudices of infidelity: but there are secret charms in goodness, which take fast hold of the hearts of men; and do insensibly, but effectually, command our love and esteem.

And surely nothing can be more proper to the occasion of this day, than a discourse upon this argument, which so directly tends to correct that unchristian spirit and mistaken zeal which hath been the cause of all our troubles and confusions, and had so powerful an influence upon that horrid tragedy which was designed, now near upon fourscore years ago, to have been acted as upon this day.

And that we may the better understand the reason of our

our Saviour's reproof here in the text, it will be requiſite to conſider the occaſion of this hot and furious zeal which appeared in ſome of his diſciples. And that was this: Our Saviour was going from Galilee to Jeruſalem; and, being to paſs through a village of Samaria, he ſent meſſengers before him, to prepare entertainment for him: but the people of that place would not receive him, becauſe he was going to Jeruſalem. The reaſon whereof was, the difference of religion which then was between the Jews and the Samaritans. Of which I ſhall give you this brief account.

The Samaritans were originally that colony of the Aſſyrians which we find in the book of Kings was, upon the captivity of the ten tribes, planted in Samaria by Salmanaſſer. They were Heathens, and worſhipped their own idols, till they were ſo infeſted with lions, that, for the redreſs of this miſchief, they deſired to be inſtructed in the worſhip of the God of Iſrael, hoping by this means to appeaſe the anger of the God of the country; and then they worſhipped the God of Iſrael together with their own idols; for ſo it is ſaid in the hiſtory of the Kings, that *they feared the Lord, and ſerved their own gods.*

After the tribe of Judah were returned from the captivity of Babylon, and the temple of Jeruſalem was rebuilt, all the Jews were obliged, by a ſolemn covenant, to put away their Heathen wives. It happened that Manaſſes, a Jewiſh Prieſt, had married the daughter of Sanballat the Samaritan; and, being unwilling to put away his wife, Sanballat excited the Samaritans to build a temple upon Mount Gerizim, near the city of Samaria, in oppoſition to the temple at Jeruſalem; and made Manaſſes his ſon-in-law Prieſt there.

Upon the building of this new temple there aroſe a great feud between the Jews and Samaritans; which in proceſs of time grew to ſo violent a hatred, that they would not ſo much as ſhew common civility to one another. And this was the reaſon why the Samaritans would not receive our Saviour in his journey, becauſe they perceived he was going to worſhip at Jeruſalem.

At this uncivil uſage of our Saviour, two of his diſciples, James and John, preſently take fire; and, out of a well-meaning zeal for the honour of their maſter, and

of the true God, and of Jerusalem the true place of his worship, they are immediately for dispatching out of the way these enemies of God, and Christ, and the true religion, these hereticks and schismaticks; for so they called one another. And to this end they desire our Saviour to give them power to *call for fire from heaven to consume them*, as Elias had done in a like case, and that too not far from Samaria. And it is not improbable, that their being so near the place where Elias had done the like before, might prompt them to this request.

Our Saviour seeing them in this heat, notwithstanding all the reasons they pretended for their passion, and for all they sheltered themselves under the great example of Elias, doth very calmly, but severely, reprove this temper of theirs: *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.*

Grotius observes, that these two excellent sentences are left out in a manuscript that is in England. I cannot tell what manuscript he refers to; but if it were a copy written out in the height of Popery, no wonder if some zealous transcriber, offended at this passage, struck it out of the gospel; being confident our Saviour would not say any thing that was so directly contrary to the current doctrine and practice of those times. But, thanks be to God, this admirable saying is still preserved, and can never be made use of upon a fitter occasion.

Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; that is, Ye own yourselves to be my disciples, but do you consider what spirit now acts and governs you? Not that surely which my doctrine designs to mould and fashion you into, which is not a furious, and persecuting, and destructive spirit; but mild, and gentle, and saving; tender of the lives and interests of men, even of those who are our greatest enemies. You ought to consider, that you are not now under the rough and sour dispensation of the law, but the calm and peaceable institution of the gospel; to which the spirit of Elias, though he was a very good man in his time, would be altogether unsuitable. God permitted it then, under that imperfect way of religion; but now under the gospel it would be intolerable: for that designs universal love, and peace, and good-will

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and now no difference of religion, no pretence of zeal for God and Christ, can warrant and justify this passionate and fierce, this vindictive and exterminating spirit.

For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. He says indeed elsewhere, that he *was not come to send peace, but a sword;* which we are not to understand of the natural tendency of his religion, but of the accidental event and effect of it, through the malice and perverseness of men. But here he speaks of the proper intention and design of his coming. He came not to kill and destroy, but *for the healing of the nations;* for the salvation and redemption of mankind, not only *from the wrath to come,* but from a great part of the evils and miseries of this life. He came to discountenance all fierceness, and rage, and cruelty in men one towards another; to restrain and subdue that furious and unpeaceable spirit, which is so troublesome to the world, and the cause of so many mischiefs and disorders in it; and to introduce a religion which consults not only the eternal salvation of mens souls, but their temporal peace and security, their comfort and happiness in this world.

The words thus explained contain this observation, That a revengeful, and cruel, and destructive spirit, is directly contrary to the design and temper of the gospel, and not to be excused upon any pretence of zeal for God and religion.

In the prosecution of this argument, I shall confine my discourse to these three heads.

1. To shew the opposition of this spirit to the true spirit and design of the Christian religion.

2. The unjustifiableness of it upon any pretence of zeal for God and religion.

3. To apply this discourse to the occasion of this day.

I. I shall shew the opposition of this spirit to the true spirit and design of the Christian religion; that it is directly opposite to the main and fundamental precepts of the gospel, and to the great patterns and examples of our religion, our blessed Saviour, and the primitive Christians.

1. This spirit which our Saviour here reproves in his disciples, is directly opposite to the main and fundamental precepts of the gospel; which command us to *love one another,*

another, and *to love all men*, even our very enemies; and are so far from permitting us to persecute those who hate us, that they forbid us to hate those who persecute us: they require us to be *merciful as our Father which is in heaven is merciful*; to be kind and tender hearted, *forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us*; and *to put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, meekness, and long-suffering*; and to *follow peace with all men*, and to *shew all meekness to all men*. And particularly, the pastors and governors of the church are especially charged to be of this temper: *The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth*. To all which precepts, and many more that I might reckon up, nothing can be more plainly opposite than inhumane cruelties and persecutions, treacherous conspiracies and bloody massacres, a barbarous inquisition, and a holy league to extirpate all that differ from us; and instead of *instructing in meekness those that oppose themselves*, to convert men with fire and faggot, and to teach them as Gideon did the *men of Succoth, with briars and thorns*; and instead of waiting for their repentance, and endeavouring to recover them out of the snare of the devil, to put them quick into his hands, and to dispatch them to hell as fast as is possible. If the precepts of Christianity can be contradicted, surely it cannot be done more grosly and palpably than by such practices.

2. This spirit is likewise directly opposite to the great patterns and examples of our religion, our blessed Saviour, and the primitive Christians. It was propheſied of our Saviour, that he should be *the prince of peace*; and should make it one of his great businesses upon earth, to make peace in heaven and earth; to reconcile men to God, and to one another; to take up all those feuds, and to extinguish all those animosities that were in the world; to bring to agreement and a peaceable demeanor one towards another, those that were most distant in their tempers and interests; to *make the lamb and the wolf lie down together, that there might be no more destroying*

ſtroying nor devouring in all God's holy mountain; that is, that that cruel and deſtructive ſpirit which prevailed before in the world, ſhould then be baniſhed out of all Chriſtian ſocieties.

And, in conformity to theſe predictions, when our Saviour was born into the world, the angels ſang that heavenly anthem, *Glory to God in the higheſt, peace on earth, and good will among men.* And when he appeared in the world, his whole life and carriage was gentle and peaceable, full of meekneſs and charity. His great buſineſs was, to be beneficial to others; to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt. *He went about doing good,* to the bodies and to the ſouls of men: his miracles were not deſtructive to mankind, but healing and charitable. He could, if he had pleaſed, by his miraculous power have confounded his enemies, and have thundered out death and deſtruction againſt the infidel world, as his pretended Vicar hath ſince done againſt hereticks. But, intending that his religion ſhould be propagated in human ways, and that men ſhould be drawn to the profeſſion of it by the *bands of love, and the cords of a man,* by the gentle and peaceable methods of reaſon and perſuaſion; he gave no example of a furious zeal and religious rage againſt thoſe who deſpiſed his doctrine. It was propounded to men for their great advantage, and they rejected it at their utmoſt peril. It ſeemed good to the author of this inſtitution, to compel no man to it by temporal puniſhments. When he went about making proſelytes, he offered violence to no man; only ſaid, *If any man will be my diſciple; If any man will come after me.* And when his diſciples were leaving him, he does not ſet up an inquiſition to torture and puniſh them for their defection from the faith; only ſays, *Will ye alſo go away?*

And, in imitation of this bleſſed pattern, the Chriſtian church continued to ſpeak and act for ſeveral ages. And this was the language of the holy fathers: *Lex nova non ſe vindicat ultore gladio*: "The Chriſtian law doth "not avenge itſelf by the ſword." This was then the ſtyle of councils: *Nemini ad credendum vim inferre*: "To "offer violence to no man to compel him to the faith." I proceed, in the

II. Second place, to ſhew the unjuſtifiableneſs of this

ſpirit, upon any pretence whatſoever of zeal for God and religion. No caſe can be put with circumſtances of greater advantage, and more likely to juſtify this ſpirit and temper, than the caſe here in the text. Thoſe againſt whom the diſciples would have called for *fire from heaven*, were hereticks, and ſchiſmaticks from the true church. They had affronted our Saviour himſelf in his own perſon; the honour of God, and of that religion which he had ſet up in the world, and of Jeruſalem which he had appointed for the place of his worſhip, were all concerned in this caſe; ſo that if ever it were warrantable to put on this fierce and furious zeal, here was a caſe that ſeemed to require it: but, even in theſe circumſtances, our Saviour thinks fit to rebuke and diſcountenance this ſpirit: *Ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of.* And he gives ſuch a reaſon as ought, in all differences of religion, how wide ſoever they be, to deter men from this temper: *For the Son of man is not come to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them;* that is, this ſpirit is utterly inconſiſtent with the great deſign of Chriſtian religion, and the end of our Saviour's coming into the world.

And now, what hath the church of Rome to plead for her cruelty to men for the cauſe of religion, which the diſciples might not much better have pleaded for themſelves in their caſe? What hath ſhe to ſay againſt thoſe who are the objects of her cruelty and perſecution, which would not have held againſt the Samaritans? Does ſhe practiſe theſe ſeverities out of a zeal for truth, and for the honour of God, and Chriſt, and the true religion? Why, upon theſe very accounts it was, that the diſciples would have called for *fire from heaven* to have deſtroyed the Samaritans. Is the church of Rome perſuaded, that thoſe whom ſhe perſecutes, are hereticks and ſchiſmaticks, and that no puniſhment can be too great for ſuch offenders? So the diſciples were perſuaded of the Samaritans; and upon much better grounds: only the diſciples had ſome excuſe in their caſe, which the church of Rome hath not; and that was ignorance. And this apology our Saviour makes for them, *Ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of.* They had been bred up in the Jewiſh religion, which gave ſome indulgence to this kind of temper, and they were able to cite a great example for themſelves; beſides,

besides, they were then but learners, and not thoroughly instructed in the Christian doctrine. But in the church of Rome, whatever the case of particular persons may be, as to the whole church, and the governing part of it, this ignorance is wilful and affected; and therefore inexcusable. For the Christian religion, which they profess to embrace, does as plainly teach the contrary, as it does any other matter whatsoever: and it is not more evident in the New Testament that Christ died for sinners, than that Christians should not kill one another for the misbelief of any article of revealed religion; much less for the disbelief of such articles as are invented by men, and imposed as the doctrines of Christ.

You have heard what kind of spirit it is which our Saviour here reproves in his disciples. It was a furious and destructive spirit, contrary to Christian charity and goodness. But yet this may be said in mitigation of their fault, that they themselves offered no violence to their enemies: they left it to God, and no doubt would have been very glad that he would have manifested his severity upon them, by sending down *fire from heaven* to have consumed them.

But there is a much worse spirit than this in the world, which is not only contrary to Christianity, but to the common principles of natural religion, and even to humanity itself; which, by falshood and perfidiousness, by secret plots and conspiracies, or by open sedition and rebellion, by an inquisition or massacre, by deposing and killing Kings, by fire and sword, by the ruin of their country, and betraying it into the hands of foreigners; and, in a word, by dissolving all the bonds of human society, and subverting the peace and order of the world, that is, by all the wicked ways imaginable, doth incite men to promote and advance their religion: as if all the world were made for them, and there were not only no other Christians, but no other men besides themselves; as Babylon of old proudly vaunted, *I am, and there is none besides me:* and as if the God whom the Christians worship, were not the God of order, but of confusion; as if he whom we call *the Father of mercies*, were delighted with cruelty, and could not have a more pleasing sacrifice offered to him than a massacre; nor put a

greater honour upon his prieſts, than to make them judges of an inquiſition; that is, the inventers and decreers of torments for men more righteous and innocent than themſelves.

Thus to miſrepreſent God and religion, is to diveſt them of all their majeſty and glory. For if that of Seneca be true, that *ſine bonitate nulla majeſtas*, "without "goodneſs there can be no ſuch thing as majeſty;" then to ſeparate goodneſs and mercy from God, compaſſion and charity from religion, is to make the two beſt things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

How much righter apprehenſions had the Heathen of the divine nature, which they looked upon as ſo benign and beneficial to mankind, that, as Tully admirably ſays, *Dii immortales ad uſum hominum fabrefacti penè videantur*: "The nature of the immortal Gods may al-"moſt ſeem to be exactly framed for the benefit and ad-"vantage of men?" And as for religion, they always ſpake of it as the great band of human ſociety, and the foundation of truth, and fidelity, and juſtice among men. But when religion once comes to ſupplant moral righteouſneſs, and to teach men the abſurdeſt things in the world, to lie for the truth, and to kill men for God's ſake; when it ſerves to no other purpoſe, but to be a bond of conſpiracy, to inflame the tempers of men to a greater fierceneſs, and to ſet a keener edge upon their ſpirits, and to make them ten times more the *children of wrath* and cruelty than they were by nature; then ſurely it loſes its nature, and ceaſes to be religion. For let any man ſay worſe of Atheiſm and infidelity, if he can. And, for God's ſake, what is religion good for, but to reform the manners and diſpoſitions of men, to reſtrain human nature from violence and cruelty, from falſhood and treachery, from ſedition and rebellion? Better it were there were no revealed religion, and that human nature were left to the conduct of its own principles and inclinations, which are much more mild and merciful, much more for the peace and happineſs of human ſociety, than to be acted by a religion that inſpires men with ſo wild a fury, and prompts them to commit ſuch outrages; and is continually ſupplanting government, and undermining the welfare of mankind; in ſhort, ſuch a religion

religion as teaches men to propagate and advance itself by means so evidently contrary to the very nature and end of all religion.

And this, if it be well considered, will appear to be a very convincing way of reasoning, by shewing the last result and consequence of such principles, and of such a train of propositions, to be a most gross and palpable absurdity. For example: We will at present admit Popery to be the true religion, and their doctrines of extirpating hereticks, of the lawfulness of deposing Kings, and subverting government by all the cruel and wicked ways that can be thought of, to be, as in truth they are, the doctrines of this religion: in this case, I would not trouble myself to debate particulars: but if in the gross, and upon the whole matter, it be evident, that such a religion as this is as bad or worse than infidelity, and no religion; this is conviction enough to a wise man, and as good as a demonstration, that this is not the true religion, and that it cannot be from God.

How much better teachers of religion were the old Heathen philosophers? in all whose books and writings there is not one principle to be found of treachery or rebellion; nothing that gives the least countenance to an assassination or a massacre, to the betraying of one's native country, or the cutting of his neighbour's throat for difference in opinion. I speak it with grief and shame, because the credit of our common Christianity is somewhat concerned in it, that Panætius, and Antipater, and Diogenes the Stoick, Tully, and Plutarch, and Seneca, were much honester and more Christian casuists, than the Jesuits are, or the generality of the casuists of any other order, that I know of, in the church of Rome. I come now, in the

III. Third and last place, to make some application of this discourse.

1. Let not religion suffer for those faults and miscarriages which really proceed from the ignorance of religion, and from the want of it. That, under colour and pretence of religion, very bad things are done, is no argument that religion itself is not good; because the best things are liable to be perverted and abused to very ill purposes: nay, the corruption of them is commonly

the worſt; as they ſay, the richeſt and nobleſt wines make the ſharpeſt vinegar. *If the light that is in you,* ſaith our Saviour, *be darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs?*

2. Let us beware of that church which countenances this unchriſtian ſpirit here condemned by our Saviour; and which teaches us ſuch doctrines, and warrants ſuch practices, as are conſonant thereto. You all know, without my ſaying ſo, that I mean the church of Rome; in which are taught ſuch doctrines as theſe, That hereticks, that is, all who differ from them in matters of faith, are to be extirpated by fire and ſword; which was decreed in the third and fourth Lateran councils, where all Chriſtians are ſtrictly charged to endeavour this to the uttermoſt of their power, *ſicut reputari cupiunt & haberi fideles*; "as they deſire to be eſteemed and accounted Chriſtians." Next, their doctrines of depoſing Kings, and of abſolving their ſubjects from obedience to them; which were not only univerſally believed, but practiſed by the Popes and Roman church for ſeveral ages. Indeed this doctrine hath not been at all times alike frankly and openly avowed; but it is undoubtedly theirs; and hath frequently been put in execution, though they have not thought it ſo convenient at all turns to make profeſſion of it. It is a certain kind of engine, which is to be ſcrewed up or let down as occaſion ſerves; and is commonly kept like Goliah's ſword in the ſanctuary behind the ephod, but yet ſo that the High Prieſt can lend it out upon an extraordinary occaſion.

And for practices conſonant to theſe doctrines, I ſhall go no farther than the horrid and bloody deſign of this day: ſuch a myſtery of iniquity, as had been hid from ages and generations; ſuch a maſter-piece of villany, as eye had not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor ever before entered into the heart of man; ſo prodigiouſly barbarous, both in the ſubſtance and circumſtances of it, as is not to be paralleled in all the voluminous records of time, from the foundation of the world.

Of late years our adverſaries (for ſo they have made themſelves without any provocation of ours) have almoſt had the impudence to deny ſo plain a matter of fact; but I wiſh they have not taken an effectual courſe by freſh conſpiracies,

conſpiracies, of equal or greater horror, to confirm the belief of it with a witneſs. But I ſhall not anticipate what will be more proper for another day, but confine myſelf to the preſent occaſion.

I will not trouble you with a particular narrative of this dark conſpiracy, nor the obſcure manner of its diſcovery, which Bellarmine himſelf acknowledges not to have been without a miracle. Let us thank God that it was ſo happily diſcovered and diſappointed, as I hope their preſent deſign will be by the ſame wonderful and merciful providence of God towards a moſt unworthy people. And may the lameneſs and halting of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jeſuits, never depart from that order, but be a fate continually attending all their villanous plots and contrivances.

I ſhall only obſerve to you, that, after the diſcovery of this plot, the authors of it were not convinced of the evil, but ſorry for the miſcarriage of it. Sir Everard Digby, whoſe very original papers and letters are now in my hands, after he was in priſon, and knew he muſt ſuffer, calls it *the beſt cauſe;* and was extremely troubled to hear it "cenſured by Catholicks and prieſts, contrary to his expectation, for a great ſin. Let me tell you (ſays he) what a grief it is, to hear THAT ſo much condemned, which I did believe would have been otherwiſe thought of by Catholicks." And yet he concludes that letter with theſe words: "In how full joy ſhould I die, if I could do any thing for the cauſe which I love more than my life!" And in another letter he ſays, he could have ſaid ſomething to have mitigated the odium of this buſineſs, as to that point of involving thoſe of his own religion in the common ruin: "I dare not (ſays he) take that courſe that I could, to make it appear leſs odious; for divers were to have been brought out of danger, who now would rather hurt them than otherwiſe. I do not think there would have been three worth the ſaving, that ſhould have been loſt." And as to the reſt that were to have been ſwallowed up in that deſtruction, he ſeems not to have the leaſt relenting in his mind about them. All doubts he ſeems to have looked upon as temptations, and intreats his friends "to pray for the pardoning of his not

"ſufficient

" ſufficient ſtriving againſt temptations ſince this buſineſs
" was undertook."

Good God! that any thing that is called religion, ſhould ſo perfectly ſtrip men of all humanity, and tranſform the mild and gentle race of mankind into ſuch wolves and tygers; that ever a pretended zeal for thy glory ſhould indigate men to diſhonour thee at ſuch a rate! It is believed by many, and not without cauſe, that the Pope and his faction are the Antichriſt. I will ſay no more than I know in this matter. I am not ſo ſure that it is he that is particularly deſigned in ſcripture by that name, as I am of the main articles of the Chriſtian faith; but however that be, I challenge Antichriſt himſelf, whoever he be, and whenever he comes, to do worſe and wickeder things than theſe.

But I muſt remember my text, and take heed of imitating that ſpirit which is there condemned, whilſt I am inveighing againſt it. And in truth it almoſt looks uncharitably to ſpeak the truth in theſe matters, and barely to relate what theſe men have not bluſhed to do. I need not, nay I cannot aggravate theſe things; they are too horrible in themſelves, even when they are expreſſed in the ſofteſt and gentleſt words.

I would not be underſtood to charge every particular perſon who is or hath been in the Roman communion with the guilt of theſe or the like practices; but I muſt charge their doctrines and principles with them: I muſt charge the heads of their church, and the prevalent teaching and governing part of it, who are uſually the contrivers and abetters, the executioners and applauders of theſe curſed deſigns.

I do willingly acknowledge the great piety and charity of ſeveral perſons who have lived and died in that communion, as Eraſmus, father Paul, Thuanus, and many others; who had in truth more goodneſs than the principles of that religion do either incline men to, or allow of. And yet he that conſiders how univerſally almoſt the Papiſts in Ireland were engaged in that maſſacre, which is ſtill freſh in our memories, will find it very hard to determine, how many degrees of innocency and good nature, or of coldneſs and indifferency in religion, are

neceſſary

neceſſary to overbalance the fury of a blind zeal and a miſguided conſcience.

I doubt not but Papiſts are made like other men. Nature hath not generally given them ſuch ſavage and cruel diſpoſitions, but their religion hath made them ſo. Whereas true Chriſtianity is not only the beſt, but the beſt-natured inſtitution in the world; and ſo far as any church is departed from good nature, and become cruel and barbarous, ſo far is it degenerated from Chriſtianity. I am loth to ſay it, and yet I am confident it is very true, that many Papiſts would have been excellent perſons and very good men, if their religion had not hindered them; if the doctrines and principles of their church had not perverted and ſpoiled their natural diſpoſitions.

I ſpeak not this to exaſperate you, worthy patriots, and the great bulwark of our religion, to any unreaſonable or unneceſſary, much leſs unchriſtian ſeverities againſt them. No: let us not do like them; let us never do any thing for religion that is contrary to it. But I ſpeak it to awaken your care thus far, that, if their prieſts will always be putting theſe pernicious principles into the minds of the people, effectual proviſion may be made, that it may never be in their power again to put them in practice. We have found by experience, that ever ſince the reformation they have been continually pecking at the foundations of our peace and religion: when, God knows, we have been ſo far from thirſting after their blood, that we did not ſo much as deſire their diſquiet, but in order to our own neceſſary ſafety, and indeed to theirs.

And God be praiſed for thoſe matchleſs inſtances which we are able to give of the generous humanity and Chriſtian temper of the Engliſh Proteſtants. After Queen Mary's death, when the Proteſtant religion was reſtored, Biſhop Bonner, notwithſtanding all his cruelties and butcheries, was permitted quietly to live and die amongſt us. And after the treaſon of this day, nay at this very time, ſince the diſcovery of ſo barbarous a deſign, and the higheſt provocation in the world, by the treacherous murder of one of his Majeſty's Juſtices of the Peace, (a very good man, and a moſt excellent magiſtrate), who had been active in the diſcovery of this plot; I ſay, after

ter all this, and notwithstanding the continued and insupportable insolence of their carriage and behaviour, even upon this occasion, no violence, nay not so much as any incivility, that I ever heard of, hath been offered to any of them. I would to God they would but seriously consider this one difference between our religion and theirs, and which of them comes nearest to *the wisdom which is from above*, which is *peaceable*, and *gentle*, and *full of mercy*. And I do heartily pray, and have good hopes, that, upon this occasion, God will open their eyes so far, as to convince a great many among them, that that cannot be the true religion which inspires men with such barbarous minds.

I have now done; and if I have been transported upon this argument somewhat beyond my usual temper, the occasion of this day, and our present circumstances, will, I hope, bear me out. I have expressed myself all along with a just sense, and with no unjust severity, concerning these horrid principles and practices; but yet with great pity and tenderness towards those miserably seduced souls, who have been deluded by them, and ensnared in them. And I can truly say, as the Roman orator did of himself upon another occasion, *Me natura misericordem, patria severum, crudelem nec patria nec natura esse voluit*: "My nature inclines me to be tender and compassionate; "a hearty zeal for our religion, and concernment for "the publick welfare of my country, may perhaps have "made me a little severe; but neither my natural disposition, nor the temper of the English nation, nor the "genius of the Protestant, that is, the true Christian religion, will allow me to be cruel."

For the future, let us *encourage ourselves in the Lord our God*: and *commit* our cause, and *the keeping of our souls to him in well-doing*: and, under God, let us leave it to the wisdom and care of his Majesty, and his two houses of parliament, to make a lasting provision for the security of our peace and religion, against all the secret contrivances and open attempts of these sons of violence. And let us remember those words of David, Psal. xxxvii. 12. 13. 14. 15. *The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn*

drawn out their sword, and bent their bow to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.

And I hope, considering what God hath heretofore done, and hath now begun to do for us, we may take encouragement to ourselves against all the enemies of our religion which are confederated against us, in the words of the Prophet, Is. viii. 9. 10. *Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: FOR GOD IS WITH US.*

And now what remains, but to make our most devout and thankful acknowledgments to almighty God, for the invaluable blessing of our Reformed religion, and for the miraculous deliverance of this day, and for the wonderful discovery of the late horrid and barbarous conspiracy against our prince, our peace, and our religion?

To *him* therefore, our most gracious and merciful God, our *shield*, and our *rock*, and our mighty *deliverer*; who hath *brought us out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage*; and hath set us free from Popish tyranny and superstition, *a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear:*

Who hath from time to time delivered us from the bloody and merciless designs of *wicked and unreasonable men*; and hath rendered all the plots and contrivances, the mischievous counsels and devices of these worse than Heathens, of none effect:

Who did, as upon this day, rescue our King and our princes, our Nobles, and the heads of our tribes, the governors of our church, and the judges of the land, from that fearful destruction which was ready to have swallowed them up:

Who still *brings to light the hidden things of darkness*, and hath hitherto preserved our religion and civil interests to us, in despite of all the malicious and restless attempts of our adversaries;

Unto

Unto that great God, who hath done ſo great things for us, and hath ſaved us by a mighty ſalvation; who *hath delivered us, and doth deliver us, and we truſt will ſtill deliver us;* be glory and honour, thankſgiving and praiſe, from generation to generation. *And let all the people ſay, Amen.*

SERMON XX.

Preached at the firſt general meeting of the Gentlemen, and others, in and near London, born within the county of York.

The EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

To my honoured friends and countrymen,

Mr. Hugh Frankland,
Leonard Robinſon,
Abrah. Fothergill,
William Fairfax,
Thomas Johnſon,
John Hardeſty,

Mr. Gervas Wilcocks,
George Pickering,
Edward Duffeild,
John Topham,
James Longbotham,
Nathan. Holroyd,

Stewards of the YORKSHIRE FEAST.

GENTLEMEN,

THis ſermon, which was firſt preached, and is now publiſhed at your deſires, I dedicate to your names, to whoſe prudence and care the direction and management of this firſt general meeting of our countrymen was committed; heartily wiſhing that it may be ſome way ſerviceable to the healing of our unhappy differences, and the reſtoring of unity and charity among Chriſtians, eſpecially thoſe of the Proteſtant Reformed religion. I am,

GENTLEMEN,

Your affectionate countryman and humble ſervant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

The

The SERMON.

JOHN xiii. 34. 35.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye alſo love one another. By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another.

AS the Chriſtian religion in general is the beſt philoſophy, and moſt perfect inſtitution of life, containing in it the moſt entire and compleat ſyſtem of moral rules and precepts that was ever yet extant in the world; ſo it peculiarly excels in the doctrine of love and charity; earneſtly recommending, ſtrictly injoining, and vehemently, and almoſt perpetually preſſing and inculcating the excellency and neceſſity of this beſt of graces and virtues; and propounding to us, for our imitation and encouragement, the moſt lively and heroical example of kindneſs and charity that ever was, in the life and death of the great founder of our religion, *the author and finiſher of our faith*, Jeſus the Son of God.

So that the goſpel, as it hath in all other parts of our duty cleared the dimneſs and obſcurity of natural light, and ſupplied the imperfections of former revelations; ſo doth it moſt eminently reign and triumph in this great and bleſſed virtue of charity; in which all the philoſophy and religions that had been before in the world, whether Jewiſh or Pagan, were ſo remarkably defective.

With great reaſon then doth our bleſſed Saviour call this *a new commandment*, and aſſert it to himſelf as a thing peculiar to his doctrine and religion; conſidering how imperfectly it had been taught, and how little it had been practiſed in the world before: *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye alſo love one another. By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another.*

I ſhall reduce my diſcourſe upon theſe words under theſe ſix heads.

1. To inquire in what ſenſe our Saviour calls this

commandment, of loving one another, *a new commandment.*

2. To declare to you the nature of this commandment, by inſtancing in the chief acts and properties of love.

3. To conſider the degrees and meaſures of our charity, with regard to the ſeveral objects about which it is exerciſed.

4. Our obligation to this duty, not only from our Saviour's authority, but likewiſe from our own nature, and from the reaſonableneſs and excellency of the thing commanded.

5. The great example which is here propounded to our imitation: *As I have loved you, that ye alſo love one another.*

6. and laſtly, The place and rank which this precept holds in the Chriſtian religion. Our Saviour makes it the proper badge of a *diſciple*, the diſtinctive mark and character of our profeſſion: *By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another.*

I. In what ſenſe our Saviour calls this commandment, of loving one another, *a new commandment:* not that it is abſolutely and altogether new, but upon ſome ſpecial accounts. For it is a branch of the ancient and primitive law of nature. Ariſtotle truly obſerves, that, upon grounds of natural kindred and likeneſs, all men are friends, and kindly diſpoſed towards one another. And it is a known precept of the Jewiſh religion, to *love our neighbour as ourſelves.*

In ſome ſenſe then it is *no new commandment.* And ſo St. John, who was moſt likely to underſtand our Saviour's meaning in this particular, (all his preaching and writing being almoſt nothing elſe, but an inculcating of this one precept), explains this matter, telling us that in ſeveral reſpects it was, and it was not *a new commandment:* 1 John ii. 7. 8. *Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but that which ye had from the beginning;* that is, from ancient times. But then he corrects himſelf: *Again,* πάλιν, *but yet a new commandment I write unto you.* So that, though it was not abſolutely new, yet upon divers conſiderable accounts it was ſo, and in a peculiar manner proper to the evangelical inſtitution; and

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is in so express and particular a manner ascribed to the teaching of the Holy Ghost, which was conferred upon Christians by the faith of the gospel, as if there hardly needed any outward instruction and exhortation to that purpose, 1 Thess. iv. 9. *But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are* θεοδίδακτοι, *divinely taught and inspired to love one another.*

This commandment then, of *loving one another*, is by our Lord and Saviour so much enlarged as to the object of it, beyond what either the Jews or Heathens did understand it to be, extending to all mankind, and even to our greatest enemies; so greatly advanced and heightened as to the degree of it, even to the laying down of our lives for one another; so effectually taught, so mightily encouraged, so very much urged and insisted upon, that it may very well be called *a new commandment*. For though it was not altogether unknown to mankind before, yet it was never so taught, so encouraged; never was such an illustrious example given of it, never so much weight and stress laid upon it by any philosophy or religion that was before in the world.

II. I shall endeavour to declare to you the nature of this commandment, or the duty required by it. And that will best be done, by instancing in the chief acts and properties of love and charity: As, humanity and kindness in all our carriage and behaviour towards one another; for love smooths the dispositions of men, so that they are not apt to grate upon one another: next, to rejoice in the good and happiness of one another, and to grieve at their evils and sufferings; for love unites the interests of men so as to make them affected with what happens to another, as if it were in some sort their own case: then to contribute as much as in us lies to the happiness of one another, by relieving one another's wants, and redressing their misfortunes: again, tenderness of their good name and reputation; a proneness to interpret all the words and actions of men to the best sense; patience and forbearance towards one another; and when differences happen, to manage them with all possible calmness and kindness, and to be ready to forgive and to be reconciled to one another; to pray one for another;

other; and, if occaſion be, at leaſt if the publick good of Chriſtianity require it, to be ready to lay down our lives for our brethren, and to ſacrifice ourſelves for the furtherance of their ſalvation.

III. We will conſider the degrees and meaſures of our charity, with regard to the various objects about which it is exerciſed.

And as to the negative part of this duty, it is to be extended equally towards all. We are not to hate or bear ill-will to any man, or to do him any harm or miſchief: *Love worketh no evil to his neighbour.* Thus much charity we are to exerciſe towards all without any exception, without any difference.

And as to the poſitive part of this duty, we ſhould bear an univerſal good-will to all men, wiſhing every man's happineſs, and praying for it as heartily as for our own: and if we be ſincere herein, we ſhall be ready upon all occaſions to procure and promote the welfare of all men. But the outward acts and teſtimonies of our charity neither can be actually extended to all, nor ought to be to all alike. We do not know the wants of all, and therefore our knowledge of perſons, and of their conditions, doth neceſſarily limit the effects of our charity within a certain compaſs; and of thoſe we do know, we can but relieve a ſmall part for want of ability. Whence it becomes neceſſary, that we ſet ſome rules to ourſelves for the more diſcreet ordering of our charity; ſuch as theſe. Caſes of extremity ought to take place of all other; obligations of nature, and nearneſs of relation, ſeem to challenge the next place; obligations of kindneſs, and upon the account of benefits received, may well lay the next claim; and then the *houſhold of faith* is to be peculiarly conſidered. And after theſe, the merit of the perſons, and all circumſtances belonging to them, are to be weighed and valued. Thoſe who labour in an honeſt calling, but are oppreſſed with their charge; thoſe who are fallen from a plentiful condition, eſpecially by miſfortune, and the providence of God, without their own fault; thoſe who have relieved others, and have been eminently charitable and beneficial to mankind; and, laſtly, thoſe whoſe viſible neceſſities and infirmities of body or mind, whether by age or by accident, do plead

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for them: all these do challenge our more especial regard and consideration.

IV. We will consider our obligations to this duty, not only from our Saviour's authority, but likewise from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing commanded. This is the commandment of the Son of God, who came down from heaven with full authority to declare the will of God to us. And this is peculiarly *his commandment*, which he urgeth upon his disciples so earnestly, and so as if he almost required nothing else in comparison of this: John xv. 12. *This is my commandment, that ye love one another;* and ℣ 17. *These things I command you, that ye love one another:* as if this were the end of all his precepts, and of his whole doctrine, to bring us to the practice of this duty. And so St. John, the loving and beloved disciple, speaks of it as the great message which the Son of God was to deliver to mankind: 1 John iii. 11. *This is the message which ye have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;* and ℣. 23. *This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment;* and chap. iv. ℣ 21. *This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.*

But besides the authority of our Saviour, we have a precedent obligation to it from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing itself. The frame of our nature disposeth us to it, and our inclination to society, in which there can be no pleasure, no advantage, without mutual love and kindness. And equity also calls for it; for that we ourselves wish and expect kindness from others, is conviction enough to us that we owe it to others. The fulfilling of this law is the great perfection of our natures, the advancement and enlargement of our souls, the chief ornament and beauty of a great mind. It makes us like to God, the best, and most perfect, and happiest being, in that which is the prime excellency, and happiness, and glory of the divine nature.

And the advantages of this temper are unspeakable and innumerable. It freeth our souls from those unruly, and troublesome, and disquieting passions which are the great

torment of our spirits; from anger and envy, from malice and revenge, from jealousy and discontent. It makes our minds calm and chearful, and puts our souls into an easy posture, and into good humour; and maintains us in the possession and enjoyment of ourselves: it preserves men from many mischiefs and inconveniencies, to which enmity and ill-will do perpetually expose them: it is apt to make friends, and to gain enemies; and to render every condition either pleasant, or easy, or tolerable to us. So that to love others, is the truest love to ourselves, and doth redound to our own unspeakable benefit and advantage in all respects.

It is a very considerable part of our duty, and almost equalled by our Saviour with the *first and great commandment of the law*. It is highly acceptable to God, most beneficial to others, and very comfortable to ourselves. It is the easiest of all duties, and it makes all others easy; the pleasure of it makes the pains to signify nothing, and the delightful reflexion upon it afterwards is a most ample reward of it. It is a duty in every man's power to perform, how strait and indigent soever his fortune and condition be. The poorest man may be as charitable as a prince; he may have as much kindness in his heart, though his hand cannot be so bountiful and munificent. Our Saviour instanceth in the giving of a *cup of cold water*, as a charity that will be highly accepted and rewarded by God. And one of the most celebrated charities that ever was, how small was it for the matter of it, and yet how great in regard of the mind that gave it? I mean the widow's *two mites*, which she *cast into the treasury*. One could hardly give less, and yet none can give more; for she gave *all that she had*. All these excellencies and advantages of love and charity, which I have briefly recounted, are so many arguments, so many obligations to the practice of this duty.

V. We will consider the great instance and example which is here propounded to our imitation: *As I have loved you, that ye also love one another*. The Son of God's becoming man, his whole life, his bitter death and passion, all that he did, and all that he suffered, was one great and continued proof and evidence of his mighty love to mankind. The greatest instance of love among men,

men, and that too but very rare, is for a man *to lay down his life for another, for his friend;* but the Son of God died for all mankind, and we were all his enemies. And ſhould we not chearfully imitate the example of that great love and charity, the effects whereof are ſo comfortable, ſo beneficial, ſo happy to every one of us? Had he not loved us, and died for us, we had certainly periſhed, we had been miſerable and undone to all eternity.

And to perpetuate this great example of charity, and that it might be always freſh in our memories, the great ſacrament of our religion was on purpoſe inſtituted for the commemoration of this great love of the Son of God, in laying down his life, and ſhedding his precious blood, for the wicked and rebellious race of mankind. But I have not time to enlarge upon this noble argument as it deſerves.

VI. The laſt thing to be conſidered is, the place and rank which this precept and duty holds in the Chriſtian religion. Our bleſſed Saviour here makes it the proper badge and cogniſance of our profeſſion: *By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another.* The different ſects among the Jews had ſome peculiar character to diſtinguiſh them from one another. The ſcholars of the ſeveral great Rabbi's among them had ſome peculiar ſayings and opinions, ſome cuſtoms and traditions, whereby they were ſeverally known: and ſo likewiſe the diſciples of John the Baptiſt were particularly remarkable for their great auſterities. In alluſion to theſe diſtinctions of ſects and ſchools among the Jews, our Saviour fixeth upon this mark and character whereby his diſciples ſhould be known from the diſciples of any other inſtitution, a mighty love and affection to one another.

Other ſects were diſtinguiſhed by little opinions, or by ſome external rites and obſervances in religion; but our Saviour pitcheth upon that which is the moſt real and ſubſtantial, the moſt large and extenſive, the moſt uſeful and beneficial, the moſt humane and the moſt divine quality of which we are capable.

This was his great commandment to his diſciples before he left the world; this was the legacy he left them, and

and the effect of his last prayers for them; and for this end, among others, he instituted the sacrament of his blessed body and blood, to be a lively remembrance of his great charity to mankind, and a perpetual bond of love and union amongst his followers.

And the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour do upon all occasions recommend this to us, as a principal duty and part of our religion; telling us, that *in Christ Jesus*, that is, in the Christian religion, nothing will *avail*, no not *faith* itself, unless it be enlivened and inspired by *charity*; that *love is the end of the commandment*, τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας, *the end of the evangelical declaration*, the first *fruit of the Spirit*, the spring and root of all those graces and virtues which concern our duty towards one another; that it is the sum and abridgment, the accomplishment and *fulfilling of the whole law*; that without this, whatever we pretend to in Christianity, *we are nothing*, and our *religion is vain*; that this is the greatest of all graces and virtues, greater than *faith* and *hope*; and of perpetual use and duration: *Charity never fails*.

And therefore they exhort us above all things to endeavour after it, as the crown of all other virtues: *Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves*, saith St. Peter. And St. Paul having enumerated most other Christian virtues, exhorts us above all to strive after this: *And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection.* This St. John makes one of the most certain signs of our love to God, and the want of it an undeniable argument of the contrary: *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* This he declares to be one of the best evidences that we are in a state of grace and salvation: *Hereby we know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.*

So that well might our blessed Saviour chuse this for the badge of his disciples, and make it the great precept of the best and most perfect institution. Other things might have served better for pomp and ostentation; and have more gratified the curiosity, or enthusiasm, or superstition of mankind: but there is no quality in the world

world which, upon a ſober and impartial conſideration, is of a more ſolid and intrinſick value.

And in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, the Chriſtians were very eminent for this virtue, and particularly noted for it. *Nobis notam inurit apud quoſdam:* "It is a "mark and brand ſet upon us by ſome," ſaith Tertullian; and he tells us, that it was proverbially ſaid among the Heathen, "Behold, how theſe Chriſtians love one an-"other!" Lucian, that great ſcoffer at all religion, acknowledgeth in behalf of Chriſtians, that this was the great principle which their maſter had inſtilled into them. And Julian, the bittereſt enemy that Chriſtianity ever had, could not forbear to propound to the Heathen for an example the charity of the Galileans; for ſo, by way of reproach, he calls the Chriſtians; "who (ſays he) gave "up themſelves to humanity and kindneſs;" which he acknowledgeth to have been very much to the advantage and reputation of our religion. And in the ſame letter to Arſacius, the Heathen High Prieſt of Galatia, he gives this memorable teſtimony of the Chriſtians, that their charity was not limited and confined only to themſelves, but extended even to their enemies; which could not be ſaid either of the Jews or Heathens. His words are theſe: "It is a ſhame, that when the Jews ſuffer none "of theirs to beg, and the impious Galileans relieve "not only their own, but thoſe alſo of our religion, "that we only ſhould be defective in ſo neceſſary a "duty." By all which it is evident, that love and charity is not only the great precept of our Saviour, but was in thoſe firſt and beſt times the general practice of his diſciples, and acknowledged by the Heathens as a very peculiar and remarkable quality in them.

The application I ſhall make of this diſcourſe ſhall be threefold.

1. With relation to the church of Rome.

2. With regard to ourſelves, who profeſs the Proteſtant Reformed religion.

3. With a more particular reſpect to the occaſion of this meeting.

1. With relation to the church of Rome; which we cannot chuſe but think of whenever we ſpeak of charity, and loving one another; eſpecially having had ſo late a diſcovery

diſcovery of their affection to us, and ſo conſiderable a teſtimony of the kindneſs and charity which they deſigned towards us: ſuch as may juſtly *make the ears of all that hear it to tingle*, and render Popery execrable and infamous, a frightful and a hateful thing to the end of the world.

It is now but too viſible how groſsly this great commandment of our Saviour is contradicted, not only by the practices of thoſe in that communion, from the Pope down to the meaneſt Friar; but by the very doctrines and principles, by the genius and ſpirit of that religion, which is wholly calculated for cruelty and perſecution. Where now is that mark of a *diſciple*, ſo much inſiſted upon by our Lord and Maſter, to be found in that church? and yet what is the Chriſtian church, but the ſociety and community of Chriſt's diſciples? Surely, in all reaſon, that which our Lord made the diſtinctive mark and character of his diſciples, ſhould be the principal mark of a true church. Bellarmine reckons up no leſs than fifteen marks of the true church; all which the church of Rome arrogates to herſelf alone: but he wiſely forgot that which is worth all the reſt, and which our Saviour inſiſts upon as the chief of all other, *A ſincere love and charity to all Chriſtians*. This he knew would by no means agree to his own church.

But, for all that, is is very reaſonable that churches, as well as particular Chriſtians, ſhould be judged by their charity. The church of Rome would ingroſs all faith to herſelf; faith in its utmoſt perfection, to the degree and pitch of infallibility. And they allow no body in the world, beſides themſelves, no, though they believe all the articles of the Apoſtles creed, to have one grain of true faith; becauſe they do not believe upon the authority of their church, which they pretend to be the only foundation of true faith. This is a moſt arrogant and vain pretence: but, admit it were true, yet, in the judgment of St. Paul, *though they had all faith, if they have not charity, they are nothing*.

The greateſt wonder of all is this, that they who hate and perſecute Chriſtians moſt, do all this while, the moſt confidently of all others, pretend to be the diſciples of Chriſt; and will allow none to be ſo but themſelves.

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That church which excommunicates all other Christian churches in the world, and, if she could, would extirpate them out of the world, will yet needs assume to herself to be the only Christian church; as if our Saviour had said, "*Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples*, if ye hate, and excommunicate, and kill one another." *What shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?* thou empty and impudent pretence of Christianity!

2. With relation to ourselves, who profess the Protestant Reformed religion. How is this great precept of our Saviour not only shamefully neglected, but plainly violated by us? and that not only by private hatred and ill-will, quarrels and contentions in our civil conversation and intercourse with one another, but by most unchristian divisions and animosities, in that common relation wherein we stand to one another, as brethren, as Christians, as Protestants?

Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us? and are we not in a more peculiar and eminent manner brethren, being *all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ?* Are we not all members of the same body, and partakers of the same spirit, and heirs of the same blessed hopes of eternal life?

So that, being brethren upon so many accounts, and by so many bonds and endearments all united to one another, and all travelling towards the same heavenly country, *why do we fall out by the way, since we be brethren?* Why do we not, as becomes brethren, dwell together in unity? but are so apt to quarrel, and break out into heats, to crumble into sects and parties, to divide and separate from one another upon every slight and trifling occasion?

Give me leave a little more fully to expostulate this matter, but very calmly, and *in the spirit of meekness*, and in the name of our dear Lord who loved us all at such a rate as to die for us, to recommend to you this new commandment of his, *that ye love one another*: which is almost a new commandment still, and hardly the worse for wearing; so seldom it is put on, and so little hath it been practised among Christians for several ages.

Consider seriously with yourselves: Ought not the great matters wherein we are agreed, our union in the doctrines

doctrines of the Chriſtian religion, and in all the neceſſary articles of that *faith which was once delivered to the ſaints*, in the ſame ſacraments, and in all the ſubſtantial parts of God's worſhip, and in the great duties and virtues of the Chriſtian life, to be of greater force to unite us, than difference in doubtful opinions, and in little rites and circumſtances of worſhip, to divide and break us?

Are not the things about which we differ, in their nature indifferent? that is, things about which there ought to be no difference among wiſe men? Are they not at a great diſtance from the life and eſſence of religion, and rather good or bad, as they tend to the peace and unity of the church, or are made uſe of to ſchiſm and faction, than either neceſſary or evil in themſelves? and ſhall little ſcruples weigh ſo far with us, as, by breaking the peace of the church about them, to endanger our whole religion? Shall we take one another by *the throat for a hundred pence*, when our common adverſary ſtands ready to clap upon us an action of *ten thouſand talents?* Can we in good earneſt be contented, that, rather than the ſurplice ſhould not be thrown out, Popery ſhould come in? and, rather than receive the ſacrament in the humble, but indifferent poſture of kneeling, to ſwallow the camel of tranſubſtantiation, and adore the elements of bread and wine for our God and Saviour? and, rather than to ſubmit to a ſet form of prayer, to have the ſervice of God performed in an *unknown tongue?*

Are we not yet made ſenſible, *at leaſt in this our day*, by ſo clear a demonſtration as the providence of God hath lately given us; and, had not he been infinitely merciful to us, might have proved the deareſt and moſt dangerous experiment that ever was: I ſay, are we not yet convinced, what mighty advantages our enemies have made of our diviſions, and what a plentiful harveſt they have had among us, during our differences, and upon occaſion of them? and how near their religion was to have entered in upon us at once, at thoſe wide breaches which we had made for it? And will we ſtill take counſel of our enemies, and chuſe to follow that courſe, to which, of all other, they who hate us, and ſeek our ruin, would moſt certainly adviſe

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and direct us? Will we freely offer them that advantage which they would be contented to purchase at any rate?

Let us, after all our sad experience, at last take warning to keep a stedfast eye upon our chief enemy, and not suffer ourselves to be diverted from the consideration and regard of our greatest danger by the petty provocations of our friends. So I chuse to call those who dissent from us in lesser matters; because I would fain have them so; and they ought in all reason to be so.

But, however they behave themselves, we ought not much to mind those who only fling dirt at us, whilst we are sure there are others who fly at our throats, and strike at our very hearts. Let us learn this wisdom of our enemies, who, though they have many great differences among themselves, yet they have made a shift, at this time, to unite together to destroy us. And shall not we do as much to save ourselves?

———*Fas est & ab hoste doceri.*

It was a principle among the ancient Romans, a brave and wise people, *donare inimicitias reipublicæ;* "to give "up and sacrifice their private enmities and quarrels to "the publick good and the safety of the commonwealth." And is it not to every considerate man as clear as the sun at noon-day, that nothing can maintain and support the Protestant religion amongst us, and found our church *upon a rock;* so that *when the rain falls, and the winds blow, and the floods beat upon it,* it shall stand firm and unshaken; that nothing can be a bulwark of sufficient force to resist all the arts and attempts of Popery, but an established national religion, firmly united and compacted in all the parts of it? Is it not plain to every eye, that little sects and separate congregations can never do it? but will be like a foundation of sand to a weighty building, which, whatever shew it may make, cannot stand long, because it wants union at the foundation, and for that reason must necessarily want strength and firmness?

It is not for private persons to undertake in matters of publick concernment: but I think we have no cause to doubt, but the governors of our church, notwithstanding all the advantages of authority, and we think of

reaſon too on our ſide, are perſons of that piety and prudence, that, for peace ſake, and in order to a firm union among Proteſtants, they would be content, if that would do it, not to inſiſt upon little things; but to yield them up, whether to the infirmity or importunity, or perhaps, in ſome very few things, to the plauſible exceptions of thoſe who differ from us.

But then, ſurely, on the other ſide, men ought to bring along with them a peaceable diſpoſition, and a mind ready to comply with the church in which they were born and baptized, in all reaſonable and lawful things; and deſirous, upon any terms that are tolerable, to return to the communion of it: a mind free from paſſion and prejudice, from peeviſh exceptions, and groundleſs and endleſs ſcruples; not apt to inſiſt upon little cavils and objections, to which the very beſt things, and the greateſt and the cleareſt truths in the world, are, and always will be liable: and whatever they have been heretofore, to be *henceforth no more children, toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the ſleight of men, and cunning craftineſs of thoſe who lie in wait to deceive.*

And if we were thus affected on all hands, we might yet be a happy church and nation. If we would govern ourſelves by theſe rules, and walk according to them, *peace* would be *upon us, and mercy, and on the Iſrael of God.*

3. I ſhall conclude all with a few words in relation to the occaſion of this preſent meeting. I have all this while been recommending to you, from the authority and example of our bleſſed Saviour, and from the nature and reaſon of the thing itſelf, this moſt excellent grace and virtue of charity, in the moſt proper acts and inſtances of it. But, beſides particular acts of charity to be exerciſed upon emergent occaſions, there are likewiſe charitable cuſtoms which are highly commendable; becauſe they are more certain and conſtant, of a larger extent, and of a longer continuance; as, the meeting of the ſons of the clergy, which is now formed and eſtabliſhed into a charitable corporation; and the anniverſary meetings of thoſe of the ſeveral counties of England who reſide or happen to be in London, for two of the beſt and nobleſt ends that can be, the maintaining of friendſhip,

and

and the promoting of charity. These, and others of the like kind, I call *charitable customs*, which of late years have very much obtained in this great and famous city. And it cannot but be a great pleasure and satisfaction to all good men, to see so generous, so humane, so Christian a disposition, to prevail and reign so much amongst us.

The strange overflowing of vice and wickedness in our land, and the prodigious increase and impudence of infidelity and impiety, hath of late years boded very ill to us, and brought terrible judgments upon this city and nation, and seems still to threaten us with more and greater. And the greatest comfort I have had, under these sad apprehensions of God's displeasure, hath been this, that though bad men were perhaps never worse in any age, yet the good, who I hope are not a few, were never more truly and substantially good. I do verily believe, there never were, in any time, greater and more [illegible] effects of charity; not from a blind superstition, and an ignorant zeal, and a mercenary, and arrogant, and presumptuous principle of merit, but from a sound knowledge, and a sincere love and obedience to God; or, as the Apostle expresseth it, *out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

And who that loves God and religion, can chuse but take great contentment, to see so general and forward an inclination in people this way? which hath been very much cherished of late years by this sort of meetings; and that to very good purpose and effect, in many charitable contributions, disposed in the best and wisest ways; and which likewise hath tended very much to the reconciling of the minds of men, and the allaying of those fierce heats and animosities which have been caused by our civil confusions and religious distractions. For there is nothing many times wanting to take away prejudice, and to extinguish hatred and ill-will, but an opportunity for men to see and understand one another; by which they will quickly perceive, that they are not such monsters as they have been represented one to another at a distance.

We are, I think, one of the last counties of England that have entered into this friendly and charitable kind of society: let us make amends for our late setting out, by quickening our pace, that so we may overtake and out-

ſtrip thoſe who are gone before us. Let not our charity partake of the coldneſs of our climate; but let us endeavour that it may be equal to the extent of our country: and as we are incomparably the greateſt county of England, let it appear that we are ſo by the largeneſs and extent of our charity.

"O Lord, who haſt taught us, that all our doings without charity are nothing, ſend thy Holy Ghoſt, and pour into our hearts that moſt excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace, and of all virtues; without which whoſoever liveth, is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thy only Son Jeſus Chriſt's ſake."

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great ſhepherd of the ſheep, through the blood of the everlaſting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleaſing in his ſight, through Jeſus Chriſt: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXI.

Of the trial of the ſpirits.

Preached at Whitehall, April 4. 1679.

1 JOHN iv. 1.

Beloved, believe not every ſpirit, but try the ſpirits whether they are of God; becauſe many falſe prophets are gone out into the world.

THIS caution and counſel was given upon occaſion of the falſe prophets and teachers that were riſen up in the beginning of the Chriſtian church, who endeavoured to ſeduce men from the true doctrine of the goſpel delivered by the Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour: and theſe teaching contrary things, could not both be from God; and therefore St. John calls upon Chriſtians to examine the doctrines and pretences of thoſe new teachers, whether they were from God, or not.

Believe

Believe not every ſpirit; that is, not every one that takes upon him to be inſpired, and to be a teacher come from God: *but try the ſpirits;* that is, examine thoſe that make this pretence, whether it be real or not; and examine the doctrines which they bring, becauſe there are many impoſtors abroad in the world.

This is the plain ſenſe of the words. In which there are contained theſe four propoſitions.

1. That men may, and often do, falſely pretend to inſpiration. And this is the reaſon upon which the Apoſtle grounds this exhortation: *Becauſe many falſe prophets are gone out into the world,* therefore we ſhould try who are true, and who are falſe.

2. We are not to believe every one that pretends to be inſpired, and to teach a divine doctrine. This follows upon the former: becauſe men may falſely pretend to inſpiration, therefore we are not to believe every one that makes this pretence. For any man that hath but confidence enough, and conſcience little enough, may pretend to come from God: and if we admit all pretences of this kind, we lie at the mercy of every crafty and confident man, to be led by him into what deluſions he pleaſeth.

3. Neither are we to reject all that pretend to come from God. This is ſufficiently implied in the text: for when the Apoſtle ſays, *Believe not every ſpirit,* he ſuppoſeth we are to believe ſome; and when he ſaith, *Try the ſpirits whether they be of God,* he ſuppoſeth ſome to be of God; and that thoſe which are ſo, are to be believed. Theſe three obſervations are ſo plain, that I need only to name them, to make way for the

4. Fourth, which I deſigned principally to inſiſt upon from theſe words; and that is this, That there is ſome way to diſcern mere pretenders to inſpiration, from thoſe who are truly and divinely inſpired. And this is neceſſarily implied in the Apoſtle's bidding us to *try the ſpirits whether they are of God:* for it were in vain to make any trial, if there be no way to diſcern between pretended and real inſpiration.

Now, the handling of this will give occaſion to two very material inquiries, and uſeful to be reſolved.

1. How we may diſcern between true and counterfeit

doctrines; thoſe which really are from God, and thoſe which only pretend to be ſo?

2. To whom this judgment of diſcerning doth appertain?

I. How we may diſcern between true and counterfeit doctrines and revelations? For the clearing of this I ſhall lay down theſe following propoſitions.

1. That reaſon is the faculty whereby revelations are to be diſcerned; or, to uſe the phraſe in the text, it is that whereby we are to judge what ſpirits are of God, and what not. For all revelation from God ſuppoſeth us to be men, and to be endued with reaſon; and therefore it does not create new faculties in us, but propounds new objects to that faculty which was in us before. Whatever doctrines God reveals to men, are propounded to their underſtandings; and by this faculty we are to examine all doctrines which pretend to be from God, and, upon examination, to judge whether there be reaſon to receive them as divine, or to reject them as impoſtures.

2. All ſupernatural revelation ſuppoſeth the truth of the principles of natural religion. We muſt firſt be aſſured that there is a God, before we can know that he hath made any revelation of himſelf: and we muſt know that his words are true; otherwiſe there were no ſufficient reaſon to believe the revelations which he makes to us: and we muſt believe his authority over us, and that he will reward our obedience to his laws, and puniſh our breach of them; otherwiſe there would neither be ſufficient obligation nor encouragement to obedience. Theſe, and many other things, are ſuppoſed to be true, and naturally known to us, antecedently to all ſupernatural revelation; otherwiſe the revelations of God would ſignify nothing to us, nor be of any force with us.

3. All reaſonings about divine revelations muſt neceſſarily be governed by the principles of natural religion; that is, by thoſe apprehenſions which men naturally have of the divine perfections, and by the clear notions of good and evil which are imprinted upon our natures: becauſe we have no other way to judge what is worthy of God, and credible to be revealed by him, and what not, but by the natural notions which we have of God, and of his eſſential perfections; which, becauſe we know him

to

to be immutable, we have reaſon to believe he will never contradict. And by theſe principles likewiſe we are to interpret what God hath revealed; and when any doubt ariſeth concerning the meaning of any divine revelation, (as that of the holy ſcriptures), we are to govern ourſelves, in the interpretation of it, by what is moſt agreeable to thoſe natural notions which we have of God; and we have all the reaſon in the world to reject that ſenſe which is contrary thereto. For inſtance: When God is repreſented in ſcripture as having a human ſhape, eyes, ears, and hands; the notions which men naturally have of the divine nature and perfections, do ſufficiently direct us to interpret theſe expreſſions in a ſenſe worthy of God, and agreeable to his perfection: and therefore it is reaſonable to underſtand them as rather ſpoken to our capacity, and in a figure, than to be literally intended. And this will proportionably hold in many other caſes.

4. Nothing ought to be received as a revelation from God which plainly contradicts the principles of natural religion, or overthrows the certainty of them. For inſtance: It were in vain to pretend a revelation from God, That there is no God, becauſe this is a contradiction in terms. So likewiſe to pretend a command from God, That we are to hate and deſpiſe him; becauſe it is not credible, that God ſhould require any thing of reaſonable creatures ſo unſuitable to their natures, and to their obligations to him: beſides that ſuch a law as this does tacitly involve a contradiction; becauſe, upon ſuch a ſuppoſition, to deſpiſe God, would be to obey him; and yet, to obey him, is certainly to honour him. So that in this caſe, to honour God, and to deſpiſe him, would be the ſame thing, and equal contempts of him. In like manner it would be vain to pretend any revelation from God, That there is no life after this, nor rewards and puniſhments in another world; becauſe this is contrary to thoſe natural apprehenſions which have generally poſſeſſed mankind, and would take away the main force and ſanction of the divine laws. The like may be ſaid concerning any pretended revelation from God, which evidently contradicts thoſe natural notions which men have of good and evil; as, That God ſhould command or allow ſedition

tion and rebellion, perfidiouſneſs and perjury; becauſe the practice of theſe would be apparently deſtructive of the peace and happineſs of mankind, and would naturally bring confuſion into the world: but *God is not the God of confuſion, but of order*; which St. Paul appeals to as a principle naturally known. Upon the ſame account, nothing ought to be entertained as a divine revelation which overthrows the certainty of the principles of natural religion; becauſe that would take away the certainty of divine revelation itſelf, which ſuppoſeth the truth of thoſe principles. For inſtance: Whoever pretends any revelation that brings the providence of God into queſtion, does by that very thing make ſuch a revelation queſtionable: for if God take no care of the world, have no concernment for human affairs, why ſhould we believe that he makes any revelation of his will to men? And by this principle Moſes will have falſe prophets to be tried, Deut. xiii. 1. *If there ariſe among you a prophet, and giveth thee a ſign or wonder, and the ſign or the wonder come to paſs whereof he ſpake unto thee, ſaying, Let us go after other gods, and let us ſerve them; thou ſhalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet.* And he gives the reaſon of this, ℣ 5. *Becauſe he hath ſpoken unto you to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.* Here is a caſe wherein a falſe prophet is ſuppoſed to work a true miracle, to give credit to his doctrine, which in other caſes the ſcripture makes the ſign of a true prophet; but yet in this caſe he is to be rejected as an impoſtor; becauſe the doctrine he teacheth would draw men off from the worſhip of the true God, who is naturally known, and had manifeſted himſelf to the people of Iſrael in ſo miraculous a manner, by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. So that a miracle is not enough to give credit to a prophet who teacheth any thing contrary to that natural notion which men have, That there is but one God, who only ought to be worſhipped.

5. Nothing ought to be received as a divine doctrine and revelation, without good evidence that it is ſo; that is, without ſome argument ſufficient to ſatisfy a prudent and conſiderate man. Now, ſuppoſing there be nothing in the matter of the revelation that is evidently contrary

to

to the principles of natural religion, nor to any former revelation which hath already received a greater and more ſolemn atteſtation from God, miracles are owned by all mankind to be a ſufficient teſtimony to any perſon, or doctrine, that they are from God. This was the teſtimony which God gave to Moſes, to ſatisfy the people of Iſrael that he had ſent him: Exod. iv. 1. 2. *Moſes ſaid, They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will ſay, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.* Upon this God endues him with a power of miracles, to be an evidence to them, *That they may believe that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.* And all along in the Old Teſtament, when God ſent his prophets to make a new revelation, or upon any ſtrange and extraordinary meſſage, he always gave credit to them by ſome ſign or wonder, which they foretold or wrought. And when he ſent his Son into the world, he gave teſtimony to him by innumerable, great and unqueſtionable miracles, more and greater than Moſes and all the prophets had wrought. And there was great reaſon for this; becauſe our Saviour came not only to publiſh a new religion to the world, but to put an end to that religion which God had inſtituted before. And now that the goſpel hath had the confirmation of ſuch miracles as never were wrought upon any other occaſion, no evidence inferior to this can in reaſon controul this revelation, or give credit to any thing contrary to it. And therefore, though the falſe prophets and antichriſts foretold by our Saviour, did really work miracles; yet they were ſo inconſiderable in compariſon of our Saviour's, that they deſerve no credit, in oppoſition to that revelation which had ſo clear a teſtimony given to it from heaven by miracles, beſides all other concurring arguments to confirm it.

6. and laſtly, No argument is ſufficient to prove a doctrine or revelation to be from God, which is not clearer and ſtronger than the difficulties and objections againſt it; becauſe all aſſent is grounded upon evidence, and the ſtrongeſt and cleareſt evidence always carries it: but where the evidence is equal on both ſides, that can produce nothing but a ſuſpence and doubt in the mind, whether the thing be true or not. If Moſes had not confu-

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ted Pharaoh's magicians, by working miracles which they could not work, they might reaſonably have diſputed it with him, who had been the true prophet? but when he did works plainly above the power of their magick and the devil to do, then they ſubmitted, and acknowledged, that *there was the finger of God.* So likewiſe, though a perſon work a miracle, which ordinarily is a good evidence that he is ſent by God; yet if the doctrine he brings be plainly contrary to thoſe natural notions which we have of God, this is a better objection againſt the truth of this doctrine, than the other is a proof of it; as is plain in the caſe which Moſes puts Deut. xiii. which I mentioned before.

Upon the ſame account no man can reaſonably believe the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation to be revealed by God; becauſe every man hath as great evidence that tranſubſtantiation is falſe, as any man can pretend to have that God hath revealed any ſuch thing. Suppoſe tranſubſtantiation to be part of the Chriſtian doctrine, it muſt have the ſame confirmation with the whole; and that is, miracles. But, of all doctrines in the world, it is peculiarly incapable of being proved by a miracle: for, if a miracle were wrought for the proof of it, the very ſame aſſurance which a man hath of the truth of the miracle, he hath of the falſhood of the doctrine; that is, the clear evidence of his ſenſes for both. For that there is a miracle wrought to prove, that what he ſees in the ſacrament is not bread, but the body of Chriſt, he hath only the evidence of his ſenſes; and he hath the very ſame evidence to prove, that what he ſees in the ſacrament is not the body of Chriſt, but bread. So that here ariſeth a new controverſy, whether a man ſhould believe his ſenſes giving teſtimony againſt the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, or bearing teſtimony to the miracle which is wrought to confirm that doctrine? for there is juſt the ſame evidence againſt the truth of the doctrine, which there is for the truth of the miracle. So that the argument for tranſubſtantiation, and the objection againſt it, do juſt balance one another; and where the weights in both ſcales are equal, it is impoſſible that the one ſhould weigh down the other: and conſequently tranſubſtantiation is not to be proved by a miracle; for

for that would be, to prove to a man by ſomething that he ſees, that he does not ſee what he ſees.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and clearly as I could, to give ſatisfaction to the firſt inquiry I propounded, *viz.* How we may diſcern between true and counterfeit revelations and doctrines? I proceed now to the

II. To whom this judgment of diſcerning does appertain; whether to Chriſtians in general, or to ſome particular perſon or perſons, authoriſed by God to judge for the reſt of mankind, by whoſe judgment all men are concluded and bound up? And this is an inquiry of no ſmall importance; becauſe it is one of the moſt fundamental points in difference between us and the church of Rome. And however, in many particular controverſies, as concerning tranſubſtantiation, the communion in one kind, the ſervice of God in an unknown tongue, the buſineſs of indulgences, the invocation of ſaints, the worſhip of images, they are not able to offer any thing that is fit to move a reaſonable and conſiderate man: yet in this controverſy, concerning the judge of controverſies, they are not deſtitute of ſome ſpecious appearance of reaſon, which deſerves to be weighed and conſidered. Therefore, that we may examine this matter to the bottom, I ſhall do theſe three things.

1. Lay down ſome cautions and limitations whereby we may underſtand how far the generality of Chriſtians are allowed to judge in matters of religion.

2. I ſhall repreſent the grounds of this principle.

3. Endeavour to ſatisfy the main objection of our adverſaries againſt it; and likewiſe to ſhew, that there is no ſuch reaſon and neceſſity for an univerſal infallible judge as they pretend.

1. I ſhall lay down ſome cautions and limitations, by which we may underſtand, how far the generality of Chriſtians are allowed to judge in matters of religion.

1*ſt*, Private perſons are only to judge for themſelves, and not to impoſe their judgment upon others, as if they had any authority over them. And this is reaſonable; becauſe if it were otherwiſe, a man would deprive others of that liberty which he aſſumes to himſelf, and

and which he can claim upon no other account, but becauſe it belongs to others equally with himſelf.

2*dly*, This liberty of judging is not ſo to be underſtood, as to take away the neceſſity and uſe of guides and teachers in religion. Nor can this be denied to be a reaſonable limitation; becauſe the knowledge of revealed religion is not a thing born with us, nor ordinarily ſupernaturally infuſed into men; but is to be learned as other things are. And if it be to be learned, there muſt be ſome to teach and inſtruct others: and they that will learn, muſt be modeſt and humble; and in thoſe things of which they are no competent judges, they muſt give credit to their teachers, and truſt their ſkill. For inſtance: Every unlearned man is to take it upon the credit of thoſe who are ſkilful, that the ſcriptures are truly and faithfully tranſlated; and for the underſtanding of obſcure texts of ſcripture, and more difficult points in religion, he is to rely upon thoſe whoſe proper buſineſs and employment it is to apply themſelves to the underſtanding of theſe things. For in theſe caſes every man is not capable of judging himſelf, and therefore he muſt neceſſarily truſt others: and in all other things he ought to be modeſt; and unleſs it be in plain matters, which every man can judge of, he ought rather to diſtruſt himſelf than his teacher.

And this reſpect may be given to a teacher, without either ſuppoſing him to be infallible, or making an abſolute reſignation of my judgment to him. A man may be a very able teacher, ſuppoſe of the mathematicks, and fit to have the reſpect which is due to a teacher, though he be not infallible in thoſe ſciences: and becauſe infallibility is not neceſſary to ſuch a teacher, it is neither neceſſary nor convenient that I ſhould abſolutely reſign up my judgment to him. For though I have reaſon to credit him, within the compaſs of his art, in things which I do not know; I am not therefore bound to believe him in things plainly contrary to what I and all mankind do certainly know. For example: If, upon pretence of his ſkill in arithmetick, which I am learning of him, he ſhould tell me, that twice two do not make four, but five; though I believed him to be the beſt mathematician in the world, yet I cannot believe him in this thing:

nor

nor is there reaſon I ſhould; becauſe I did not come to learn this of him, but knew as much of that before as he or any man elſe could tell me. The caſe is the ſame in matters of religion; in which there are ſome things ſo plain, and lie ſo level to all capacities, that every man is almoſt equally judge of them; as I ſhall have occaſion farther to ſhew by and by.

3*dly*, Neither does this liberty of judging exempt men from a due ſubmiſſion and obedience to their teachers and governors. Every man is bound to obey the lawful commands of his governors; and what by publick conſent and authority is determined and eſtabliſhed, ought not to be gainſaid by private perſons, but upon very clear evidence of the falſhood or unlawfulneſs of it. And this is every man's duty, for the maintaining of order, and out of regard to the peace and unity of the church; which is not to be violated upon every ſcruple and frivolous pretence: and when men are perverſe and diſobedient, authority is judge, and may reſtrain and puniſh them.

4*thly*, Nor do I ſo far extend this liberty of judging in religion, as to think every man fit to diſpute the controverſies of religion. A great part of people are ignorant, and of ſo mean capacity, as not to be able to judge of the force of a very good argument, much leſs of the iſſue of a long diſpute: and ſuch perſons ought not to engage in diſputes of religion, but to beg God's direction, and to rely upon their teachers; and above all to live up to the plain dictates of natural light, and the clear commands of God's word; and this will be their beſt ſecurity. And if the providence of God hath placed them under ſuch guides as do ſeduce them into error, their ignorance is invincible; and God will not condemn them for it, ſo long as they ſincerely endeavour to do the will of God ſo far as they know it. And this being the caſe of many, eſpecially in the church of Rome, where ignorance is ſo induſtriouſly cheriſhed, I have ſo much charity as to hope well concerning many of them. And ſeeing that church teaches and injoins the people to worſhip images, it is in ſome ſenſe charitably done of them, not to let them know the ſecond commandment, that they may not be guilty of ſinning againſt ſo plain a law.

Having premiſed theſe cautions, I proceed, in the

2. Second place, to repreſent to you the grounds of this principle of our religion, *viz.* That we allow private perſons to judge for themſelves in matters of religion.

1*ſt*, Becauſe many things in religion, eſpecially thoſe which are moſt neceſſary to be believed and practiſed, are ſo plain, that every man of ordinary capacity, after competent inſtruction in matters of religion, (which is always to be ſuppoſed), can as well judge of them for himſelf, as any man, or company of men in the world, can judge for him; becauſe in theſe he hath a plain rule to go by, natural light, and clear revelation of ſcripture. And this is no new principle of the Proteſtants, but moſt expreſsly owned by the ancient fathers. "Whatever "things are neceſſary, are plain," ſaith St. Chryſoſtom. "All things are plainly contained in ſcripture which "concern faith and a good life," ſaith St. Auſtin. And nothing can be more reaſonable, than that thoſe things which are plain to every man, ſhould be left to every man's judgment: for every man can judge of what is plain; of evident truth and falſhood, virtue and vice, of doctrines and laws plainly delivered in ſcripture, if we believe any thing to be ſo, which is next to madneſs to deny. I will refer it to no man's judgment upon earth to determine for me, Whether there be a God or not? Whether murder and perjury be ſins? Whether it be not plain in ſcripture, that Jeſus Chriſt is the Son of God, that he became man, and died for us, and roſe again? So that there is no need of a judge in theſe caſes. Nor can I poſſibly believe any man to be ſo abſolutely infallible, as not to call his infallibility into queſtion, if he determines any thing contrary to what is plain and evident to all mankind. For if he ſhould determine that there is no God, or that he is not to be worſhipped, or that he will not puniſh and reward men, or, which is the caſe that Bellarmine puts, that virtue is vice, and vice virtue; he would hereby take away the very foundation of religion: and how can I look upon him any longer as a judge in matters of religion, when there can be no ſuch thing as religion, if he have judged and determined right?

2*dly*, The ſcripture plainly allows this liberty to particular

ticular and private perſons to judge for themſelves. And for this I need go no farther than my text, which bids men *try the ſpirits whether they be of God.* I do not think this is ſpoken only to the Pope, or a general council; but to Chriſtians in general; for to theſe the Apoſtle writes. Now, if St. John had believed that God had conſtituted an infallible judge in his church, to whoſe ſentence and determination all Chriſtians are bound to ſubmit, he ought in all reaſon to have referred Chriſtians to him for the trial of ſpirits, and not have left it to every man's private judgment to examine and to determine theſe things. But it ſeems St. Paul was likewiſe of the ſame mind; and though he was guided by an infallible ſpirit, yet he did not expect that men ſhould blindly ſubmit to his doctrine: nay, ſo far is he from that, that he commends the Bereans for that very thing for which I dare ſay the church of Rome would have checked them moſt ſeverely, namely, for *ſearching the ſcriptures* to ſee *whether thoſe things* which the Apoſtles delivered *were ſo* or not. This liberty St. Paul allowed; and though he was inſpired by God, yet he treated thoſe whom he taught like men. And indeed it were a hard caſe that a neceſſity of believing divine revelations, and rejecting impoſtures, ſhould be impoſed upon Chriſtians; and yet the liberty of judging, whether a doctrine be from God or not, ſhould be taken away from them.

3*dly*, Our adverſaries themſelves are forced to grant that which in effect is as much as we contend for. For though they deny a liberty of judging in particular points of religion, yet they are forced to grant men a liberty of judging upon the whole. When they of the church of Rome would perſuade a Jew or a Heathen to become a Chriſtian; or a heretick, as they are pleaſed to call us, to come over to the communion of their church, and offer arguments to induce them thereunto; they do by this very thing, whether they will or no, make that man judge which is the true church, and the true religion: becauſe it would be ridiculous to perſuade a man to turn to their religion, and to urge him with reaſons to do ſo; and yet to deny him the uſe of his own judgment, whether their reaſons be ſufficient to move him to make ſuch a change. Now, as the Apoſtle reaſons in ano-

ther caſe, if men be fit to judge for themſelves in ſo great and important a matter as the choice of their religion, why ſhould they be thought unworthy to judge in leſſer matters? They tell us indeed, that a man may uſe his judgment in the choice of his religion; but when he hath once choſen, he is then for ever to reſign up his judgment to their church. But what tolerable reaſon can any man give, why a man ſhould be fit to judge upon the whole, and yet unfit to judge upon particular points; eſpecially if it be conſidered, that no man can make a diſcreet judgment of any religion, before he hath examined the particular doctrines of it, and made a judgment concerning them? Is it credible, that God ſhould give a man judgment in the moſt fundamental and important matter of all, *viz.* to diſcern the true religion, and the true church, from the falſe, for no other end, but to enable him to chuſe once for all to whom he ſhould reſign and inſlave his judgment for ever? which is juſt as reaſonable as if one ſhould ſay, that God hath given a man eyes for no other end, but to look out once for all, and to pitch upon a diſcreet perſon to lead him about blindfold all the days of his life. I come now to the

3. Third thing I propounded, which is, to anſwer the main objection of our adverſaries againſt this principle; and likewiſe to ſhew that there is no ſuch reaſon and neceſſity for an univerſal infallible judge as they pretend. Now, their great objection is this: If every man may judge for himſelf, there will be nothing but confuſion in religion, there will be no end of controverſies; ſo that an univerſal infallible judge is neceſſary, and without this God had not made ſufficient proviſion for the aſſurance of mens faith, and for the peace and unity of his church: or, as it is expreſſed in the Canon law, *Aliter Dominus non videretur fuiſſe diſcretus*: "Otherwiſe our Lord had "not ſeemed to be diſcreet." How plauſible ſoever this objection may appear, I do not deſpair, but if men will lay aſide prejudice, and impartially conſider things, to make it abundantly evident, that this ground is not ſufficient to found an infallible judge upon. And therefore, in anſwer to it, I deſire theſe following particulars may be conſidered.

1*ſt*, That this which they ſay, rather proves what God

God ſhould have done according to their fancy, than what he hath really and actually done. My text expreſsly bids Chriſtians to *try the ſpirits;* which to any man's ſenſe does imply, that they may judge of theſe matters: but the church of Rome ſays they may not; becauſe, if this liberty were permitted, God had not ordered things wiſely, and for the beſt, for the peace and unity of his church. But, as the Apoſtle ſays in another caſe, *What art thou, O man, that objecteſt againſt God?*

2*dly*, If this reaſoning be good, we may as well conclude, that there is an univerſal infallible judge ſet over the whole world in all temporal matters, to whoſe authority all mankind is bound to ſubmit; becauſe this is as neceſſary to the peace of the world, as the other is to the peace of the church. And men ſurely are every whit as apt to be obſtinate and perverſe about matters of temporal right, as about matters of faith. But it is evident in fact and experience, that there is no ſuch univerſal judge appointed by God over the whole world, to decide all caſes of temporal right; and for want of him the world is fain to ſhift as well as it can. But now a very acute and ſcholaſtical man, that would argue that God muſt needs have done whatever he fancies convenient for the world ſhould be done, might by the very ſame way of reaſoning conclude the neceſſity of an univerſal infallible judge in civil matters, as well as in matters of religion: and their *Aliter Dominus non videretur fuiſſe diſcretus;* "Otherwiſe God had not ſeemed to be diſcreet," is every whit as cogent and as civil in the one caſe as the other.

3*dly*, There is no need of ſuch a judge, to aſſure men in matters of religion; becauſe men may be ſufficiently certain without him. I hope it may be certain and clear enough, that there is a God, and that his providence governs the world, and that there is another life after this, though neither Pope nor council had ever declared any thing about theſe matters. And for revealed doctrines, we may be certain enough of all that is neceſſary, if it be true, which the fathers tell us, "That all things "neceſſary are plainly revealed in the holy ſcriptures."

4*thly*, An infallible judge, if there were one, is no certain way to end controverſies, and to preſerve the

unity of the church; unleſs it were likewiſe infallibly certain, that there is ſuch a judge, and who he is. For till men were ſure of both theſe, there would ſtill be a controverſy, whether there be an infallible judge, and who he is? And if it be true which they tell us, That without an infallible judge, controverſies cannot be ended; then a controverſy concerning an infallible judge can never be ended. And there are two controverſies actually on foot about an infallible judge; one, Whether there be an infallible judge or not? which is a controverſy between us and the church of Rome: and the other, Who this infallible judge is? which is a controverſy among themſelves, which could never yet be decided: and yet, till it be decided, infallibility, if they had it, would be of no uſe to them for the ending of controverſies.

5*thly*, There is no ſuch abſolute need as is pretended, of determining all controverſies in religion. If men would diveſt themſelves of prejudice and intereſt, as they ought, in matters of religion, the neceſſary things of religion are plain enough, and men would generally agree well enough about them: but if men will ſuffer themſelves to be biaſſed by theſe, they would not hearken to an infallible judge, if there were one; or they would find out ſome way or other to call his infallibility into queſtion. And as for doubtful and leſſer matters in religion, charity and mutual forbearance among Chriſtians would make the church as peaceable and happy as perhaps it was ever deſigned to be in this world, without abſolute unity in opinion.

6*thly*, and laſtly, Whatever may be the inconveniencies of mens judging for themſelves in religion; yet, taking this principle with the cautions I have given, I doubt not to make it appear, that the inconveniencies are far the leaſt on that ſide. The preſent condition of human nature doth not admit of any conſtitution of things, whether in religion or civil matters, which is free from all kind of exception and inconvenience. That is the beſt ſtate of things which is liable to the leaſt and feweſt. If men be modeſt, and humble, and willing to learn, God hath done that which is ſufficient for the aſſurance of our faith, and for the peace of his church, without an infallible

lible judge; and if men will not be ſo, I cannot tell what would be ſufficient. I am ſure there were hereſies and ſchiſms in the Apoſtles times, when thoſe who governed the church were certainly guided by an infallible Spirit. God hath appointed guides and teachers for us in matters of religion; and if we will be contented to be inſtructed by them in thoſe neceſſary articles and duties of religion which are plainly contained in ſcripture, and to be counſelled and directed by them in things that are more doubtful and difficult, I do not ſee why we might not do well enough without any infallible judge or guide.

But ſtill it will be ſaid, Who ſhall judge what things are plain, and what doubtful? The anſwer to this, in my opinion, is not difficult. For if there be any thing plain in religion, every man that hath been duly inſtructed in the principles of religion can judge of it, or elſe it is not plain. But there are ſome things in religion ſo very plain, that no guide or judge can in reaſon claim that authority over men, as to oblige them to believe or do the contrary; no, though he pretend to infallibility; no, though he were an Apoſtle, though he were an angel from heaven. St. Paul puts the caſe ſo high, Gal. i. 8. *Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other goſpel unto you, than what you have received, let him be accurſed:* which plainly ſuppoſeth, that Chriſtians may and can judge when doctrines are contrary to the goſpel. What! not believe an Apoſtle, nor *an angel from heaven*, if he ſhould teach any thing evidently contrary to the plain doctrine of the goſpel? if he ſhould determine virtue to be vice, and vice to be virtue? No: not an Apoſtle, nor an angel; becauſe ſuch a doctrine as this would confound and overturn all things in religion. And yet Bellarmine puts this very caſe, and ſays, "If the Pope ſhould ſo determine, we were bound to "believe him, unleſs we would ſin againſt conſcience."

I will conclude this diſcourſe, by putting a very plain and familiar caſe; by which it will appear what credit and authority is fit to be given to a guide, and what not. Suppoſe I came a ſtranger into England, and, landing at Dover, took a guide there to conduct me in my way to York, which I knew before by the map to lie

lie North of Dover. Having committed myſelf to him, if he lead me for two or three days together out of any plain road, and many times over hedge and ditch, I cannot but think it ſtrange, that, in a civil and well-inhabited country, there ſhould be no highways from one part of it to another; yet thus far I ſubmit to him, though not without ſome regret and impatience. But then, if after this, for two or three days more, he lead me directly South, and with my face full upon the ſun at noon-day, and at laſt bring me back again to Dover pier, and ſtill bids me follow him; then certainly no modeſty does oblige a man not to diſpute with his guide; and to tell him, ſurely that can be no way, becauſe it is ſea. Now, though he ſet never ſo bold a face upon the matter, and tell me with all the gravity and authority in the world, that it is not the ſea, but dry land, under the ſpecies and appearance of water; and that, whatever my eyes tell me, having once committed myſelf to his guidance, I muſt not truſt my own ſenſes in the caſe, it being one of the moſt dangerous ſorts of infidelity for a man to believe his own eyes, rather than his faithful and infallible guide: all this moves me not; but I begin to expoſtulate roundly with him, and to let him underſtand, that, if I muſt not believe what I ſee, he is like to be of no farther uſe to me; becauſe I ſhall not be able, at this rate, to know whether I have a guide, and whether I follow him or not. In ſhort, I tell him plainly, that, when I took him for my guide, I did not take him to tell me the difference between North and South, between a hedge and a highway, between ſea and dry land; all this I knew before, as well as he or any man elſe could tell me: but I took him to conduct and direct me the neareſt way to York. And therefore, after all his impertinent talk, after all his motives of credibility to perſuade me to believe him, and all his confident ſayings, which he gravely calls demonſtrations, I ſtand ſtiffly upon the ſhore, and leave my learned and reverend guide to take his own courſe, and to diſpoſe of himſelf as he pleaſeth; but firmly reſolved not to follow him. And is any man to be blamed that breaks with his guide upon theſe terms?

And this is truly the caſe, when a man commits himſelf

ſelf to the guidance of any perſon or church. If, by virtue of this authority, they will needs perſuade me out of my ſenſes, and not to believe what I ſee, but what they ſay; that virtue is vice, and vice virtue, if they declare them to be ſo; and that, becauſe they ſay they are infallible, I am to receive all their dictates for oracles, though never ſo evidently falſe, and abſurd in the judgment of all mankind: in this caſe, there is no way to be rid of theſe unreaſonable people, but to deſire of them, ſince one kindneſs deſerves another, and all contradictions are alike eaſy to be believed, that they would be pleaſed to believe that infidelity is faith; and that, when I abſolutely renounce their authority, I do yield a moſt perfect ſubmiſſion and obedience to it.

Upon the whole matter, all the revelations of God, as well as the laws of men, go upon this preſumption, that men are not ſtark fools, but that they will conſider their intereſt, and have ſome regard to the great concernment of their eternal ſalvation. And this is as much to ſecure men from miſtake in matters of belief, as God hath afforded to keep men from ſin in matters of practice. He hath made no effectual and infallible proviſion, that men ſhall not ſin; and yet it would puzzle any man to give a good reaſon, why God ſhould take more care to ſecure men againſt errors in belief, than againſt ſin and wickedneſs in their lives.

I ſhall now only draw three or four inferences from this diſcourſe which I have made, and ſo conclude.

1. That it is every man's duty who hath ability and capacity for it, to endeavour to underſtand the grounds of his religion. For to try doctrines, is to inquire into the grounds and reaſons of them; which the better any man underſtands, the more firmly he will be eſtabliſhed in the truth, and be the more reſolute in the day of trial, and the better able to withſtand the arts and aſſaults of cunning adverſaries, and the fierce ſtorms of perſecution. And, on the contrary, that man will ſoon be moved from his ſtedfaſtneſs, who never examined the grounds and reaſons of his belief. When it comes to the trial, he that hath but little to ſay for his religion, will probably neither do nor ſuffer much for it.

2. That all doctrines are vehemently to be ſuſpected which

which decline trial, and are ſo loth to be brought into the light; which will not endure a fair examination, but magiſterially require an implicit faith: whereas truth is bold, and full of courage, and loves to appear openly; and is ſo ſecure and confident of her own ſtrength, as to offer herſelf to the ſevereſt trial and examination. But to deny all liberty of inquiry and judgment in matters of religion, is the greateſt injury and diſparagement to truth that can be; and a tacit acknowledgment, that ſhe lies under ſome diſadvantage, and that there is leſs to be ſaid for her than for error.

I have often wondered why the people in the church of Rome do not ſuſpect their teachers and guides to have ſome ill deſign upon them, when they do ſo induſtriouſly debar them of the means of knowledge, and are ſo very loth to let them underſtand what it is that we have to ſay againſt their religion. For can any thing in the world be more ſuſpicious, than to perſuade men to put out their eyes, upon promiſe that they will help them to a much better and more faithful guide? If any church, any profeſſion of men, be unwilling their doctrines ſhould be expoſed to trial, it is a certain ſign they know ſomething by them that is faulty, and which will not endure the light. This is the account which our Saviour gives us in a like caſe. It was *becauſe mens deeds were evil*, that *they loved darkneſs rather than light*: for *every one that doth evil, hateth the light; neither cometh he to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved: but he that doth the truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifeſt, that they are wrought in God.*

3. Since reaſon and Chriſtianity allow this liberty to private perſons, to judge for themſelves in matters of religion, we ſhould uſe this privilege with much modeſty and humility, with great ſubmiſſion and deference to our ſpiritual rulers and guides, whom God hath appointed in his church. And there is very great need of this caution; ſince, by experience, we find this liberty ſo much abuſed by many, to the nouriſhing of pride and ſelf-conceit, of diviſion and faction; and thoſe who are leaſt able to judge, to be frequently the moſt forward and confident, the moſt peremptory and perverſe; and, inſtead of demeaning themſelves with the ſubmiſſion of learners,

learners, to aſſume to themſelves the authority of judges, even in the moſt doubtful and diſputable matters.

The tyranny of the Roman church over the minds and conſciences of men is not to be juſtified upon any account: but nothing puts ſo plauſible a colour upon it, as the ill uſe that is too frequently made of this natural privilege, of mens judging for themſelves in a matter of ſo infinite concernment, as that of their eternal happineſs. But then it is to be conſidered, that the proper remedy in this caſe, is not to deprive men of this privilege, but to uſe the beſt means to prevent the abuſe of it: for though the inconveniencies ariſing from the ill uſe of it may be very great, yet the miſchief on the other hand is intolerable. Religion itſelf is liable to be abuſed to very bad purpoſes, and frequently is ſo; but it is not therefore beſt that there ſhould be no religion: and yet this objection, if it be of any force, and be purſued home, is every whit as ſtrong againſt religion itſelf, as againſt mens liberty of judging in matters of religion. Nay, I add farther, that no man can judiciouſly embrace the true religion, unleſs he be permitted to judge whether that which he embraces be the true religion or not.

4. When, upon due trial and examination, we are well ſettled and eſtabliſhed in our religion, *let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*; and not be *like children, toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, through the ſleight of men, and the cunning craftineſs of thoſe who lie in wait to deceive.* And, above all, let us reſolve to live according to the excellent rules and precepts of our holy religion; let us heartily obey that doctrine which we profeſs to believe. We who enjoy the Proteſtant religion, have all the means and advantages of underſtanding the will of God, free liberty and full ſcope of inquiring into it, and informing ourſelves concerning it. We have all the opportunities we can wiſh of coming to the knowledge of our duty. The oracles of God lie open to us, and his law is continually before our eyes: *His word is nigh unto us, in our mouths, and in our hearts*, (that is, we may read it and meditate upon it), *that we may do it. The key of knowledge* is put into our hands; ſo that, if we do not *enter into the kingdom of heaven*, it is we ourſelves

ſelves that ſhut ourſelves out. And where there is nothing to hinder us from the knowledge of our duty, there certainly nothing can excuſe us from the practice of it: for the end of all knowledge is, to direct men in their duty, and effectually to engage them to the performance of it. The great buſineſs of religion is, to make men truly good, and to teach them to live well. And, if religion have not this effect, it matters not of what church any man liſts and enters himſelf; for, moſt certainly, a bad man can be ſaved in none. Though a man know the right way to heaven never ſo well, and be entered into it; yet if he will not walk therein, he ſhall never come thither: nay, it will be an aggravation of this man's unhappineſs, that he was loſt in the way to heaven, and periſhed in the very road to ſalvation. But if we will in good earneſt apply ourſelves to the practice of religion, and the obedience of God's holy laws, his grace will never be wanting to us to ſo good a purpoſe.

I have not time to recommend religion to you at large, with all its advantages. I will compriſe what I have to ſay in a few words; and mind them at your peril. Let that which is our great concernment be our great care, *to know the truth, and to do it; to fear God, and keep his commandments.* Conſidering the reaſonableneſs and the reward of piety and virtue, nothing can be wiſer. Conſidering the mighty aſſiſtance of God's grace, which he is ready to afford us, and the unſpeakable ſatisfaction and delight which is to be had in the doing of our duty, nothing can be eaſier: nothing will give us that pleaſure while we live; nothing can miniſter that true and ſolid comfort to us when we come to die. There is probably no ſuch way for a man to be happy in this world; to be ſure, there is no way but this to eſcape the intolerable and endleſs miſeries of another world.

Now, God grant that we may all *know* and do, *in this our day, the things that belong to our peace*, for his mercies ſake in Jeſus Chriſt: To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The end of the Firſt Volume.